United Nations S/PV.7600

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7600th meeting

Monday, 11 January 2016, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Rosselli	(Uruguay)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Zhao Yong
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Bertoux
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2015/1030)

Letter dated 5 January 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/8)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Expression of welcome to new members and of thanks to outgoing members of the Council

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first formal meeting of the Security Council this year, I should like to extend my warm wishes on the occasion of the New Year to all members of the Security Council, the United Nations and the Secretariat.

In presiding over this first formal meeting of the Council in 2016, I am happy to welcome the other new members: Egypt, Japan, Senegal and Ukraine. We look forward with interest to their participation in the work of the Council. Their experience and wisdom will be of invaluable assistance in the discharge of the Council's responsibilities.

I take this opportunity to express the Council's gratitude to the outgoing members, namely, Chad, Chile, Jordan, Lithuania and Nigeria, for their important contributions to the work of the Council during their terms in 2014 and 2015.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like also to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to Her Excellency Ms. Samantha Power, Permanent Representative of the United States, for her service as President of the Council for the month of December 2015. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Power and her team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

At the same time, I will very briefly share with the Council some thoughts from our side, since Uruguay has returned to the Council after a 50-year absence and is eager to work actively and closely with all members and the wider membership of the United Nations to achieve the objectives of our Organization.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Mali

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2015/1030)

Letter dated 5 January 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/8)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Mali to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Mali.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/1030, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali. I wish also to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/8, which contains a letter dated 5 January 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ladsous.

Mr. Ladsous (*spoke in French*): Allow me to begin by reiterating to you, Mr. President, and to other members my warmest congratulations on acceding to the Security Council. I am pleased at the prospect of what I am certain will be a fruitful collaboration.

I am pleased also to present the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2015/1030) and the activities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). I welcome the presence here of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali, Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, and I would like to express to him once again the deep appreciation of my Department for the excellent relations between his Government and MINUSMA.

Since the most recent consultations, held in October last, the situation in Mali has evolved considerably. The joint efforts of the Malian authorities, the signatory parties, the international mediation and MINUSMA, inter alia, have enabled us to strengthen the dynamic of dialogue and coordination among the Government, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Platform coalition. Indeed, the Government has launched a series of confidence-building measures, inter alia, the release of persons detained as a result of the conflict, and the meeting held on 23 September last year between President Keita and the representatives of the armed groups of the Coordination and the Platform, which helped to ease the situation between the parties and led to an effective cessation of the hostilities. The rapprochement between the Coordination and

the Platform has also helped to create an environment more conducive to the effective functioning of the mechanisms for monitoring the Agreement — the Comité de suivi de l'accord (CSA) and the Commission technique mixte de sécurité — which have met four times since the last Council meeting on this item (see S/PV.7528).

Allow me to highlight in that regard the particularly important role played by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Mongi Hamdi, who facilitated the rapprochement between the two movements, particularly during the Bamako meeting on 23 September. In addition, under his leadership, MINUSMA has continued to assist the support and monitoring mechanisms of the Agreement. In addition to backing the secretariat of the CSA, the Mission has placed experts at the disposal of each of its subcommittees to support their work. The Force Commander, who chairs the Commission technique mixte de sécurité, has played an equally important role in advancing the implementation of the cantonment, including through the identification of sites, the activation of joint patrols and the establishment of the operational coordination mechanism.

I am confident that the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Annadif, who is also present in the Chamber, will work to maintain the good offices and support of MINUSMA for the peace process.

While the monitoring bodies may be functional, that has not yet fully translated into tangible progress towards the implementation of the Agreement. The process has continued to encounter often significant delays. There has been positive progress with the validation of 11 cantonment sites, the launch of construction works for two of them — work on the third will begin in four days once the site has been demined — and the adoption of decrees on 29 December establishing the national commissions on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and on integration. Regrettably, only one mixed patrol has been conducted to date, on 14 November, and none since. Another positive measure was the inauguration of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, but we remain concerned that other political and institutional reforms that underpin the peace agreements are yet to be implemented.

These delays, if not addressed as soon as possible, bear the potential to unravel the hard-won confidence built to date between the signatory parties, as illustrated by the concerns expressed by the Coordination and the Platform in the latest meeting of the CSA, on 17 and 18 December. We welcome in that context the consultative meeting of the members of the CSA to be convened at the ministerial level in Algiers on 18 January, and hope that it will contribute to addressing these scheduling concerns and set new timelines for implementing outstanding reforms.

The first priority in that regard, I believe, should be the introduction of the interim administrative arrangements on which the resumption of basic services to the populations in the North depends. We understand that the parties have agreed in principle to establish temporary councils at the regional and local levels, and it is our hope that the Government and the Parliament will ensure that these structures are established as soon as possible. Moreover, it is important for the parties to prepare for the local elections, which Council members will recall were postponed in October, and to revise the electoral law, as also provided for in the Agreement. In the long term, the Government will have to turn its attention to institutional reforms, starting with the creation of the the two new regions of Taoudeni and Ménaka, and initiate the necessary consultations on the institutional reforms related to decentralization.

The Malian Government and Parliament must continue to take the lead in advancing the implementation of these reforms in a consistently inclusive and consultative manner. In this regard, we welcome the announcement by the Government that the national committee of coordination for the implementation of the peace agreement will include representatives designated by the signatory parties. We call on the movements to designate their representatives to these structures without delay, as time is of the essence if we wish to advance on the key processes of cantonment; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; and security sector reform. If all of this is to gain momentum, the work of the recently created national commission on integration will be crucial, and it is our hope that we move forward to that end.

One lesson from the past six months is that the various pillars of the Agreement are extremely interrelated, and their implementation will therefore need to take place in a parallel and synchronized manner. MINUSMA will continue to play its full role in exercising its good offices in building trust between the parties and advocating inclusivity in the peace process.

However, as we all know, there will be no lasting peace in northern Mali without the provision of peace dividends to the most vulnerable. In that regard, it will be recalled that the major meeting of international partners in Paris in October pledged over €3.2 billion for the reconstruction and development of Mali. Some progress has already been made on the ground, notably in the field of education, thanks to the good cooperation between the Government and the humanitarian actors, including for the symbolic reopening of the schools. In the three northern regions, 89 per cent of the schools that were operating before the crisis are again functional, but we note that in the areas most affected by insecurity, one in five schools remains closed due to the absence of teachers, materials, facilities and infrastructure.

Since June, MINUSMA has scaled up its support for communities in the north by 30 per cent, supporting 36 new quick-impact projects at a cost of approximately $1.3 million. New projects include the provision of drinking water in the Kidal region, equipment for health centres in Kidal and Mopti, the refurbishment of social care centres in Gao and social reintegration projects for women, young people and internally displaced persons in all the major municipalties of the north. But we must continue to do more, and we hope that the Government and the movements will soon finalize a development development strategy for the north, in accordance with Agreement and the commitment made at the Paris conference.

If I insist so strongly on the urgent need to address these challenges at the political, security and humanitarian levels, it is essentially because the peace process in Mali remains fragile and faces enormous hurdles. Recent months have shown the determination of extremist groups to derail the peace process. Members are no doubt aware of the statements issued in October and December by the leaders of the terrorist group Ansar Dine condemning the peace process, denouncing the armed groups signatories the Algiers Agreement, and threatening to step up attacks against France and its allies. That is the expression they use, which is meant to cover both the Malian Government and MINUSMA.

Extremist groups have continued to intimidate people and attack the Malian armed forces, Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA, not only in north Mali but also in the centre and south of the country. Armed groups that are themselves signatories of the Agreement have also been targeted. For example, I would mention what happened on 24 and 25 December when Ansar Dine caused 15 casualties among the ranks of the Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad, including Bilal Ag Cherif's own brother. It is clear that it is the peace process itself that is at issue. The Council had not failed to note that the attack against the Radisson Blu in Bamako occurred while the Comité de suivi de l'accord was holding meetings in Bamako, and that the hotel was the precise location of where the Algerian delegation — Algeria is the Chair of the CSA — was staying.

Our convoys and camps also remain prime targets for extremist groups. During the period covered by the report, the Force suffered no less than 28 attacks, in contrast to the 20 attacks registered in the previous three months. On 28 November, a clear night, in fact a moonlit night, six rockets hit our base, killing two of our peacekeepers and a contractor. Faced with this situation, it should be known and said that two thirds of MINUSMA's personnel — with 94 per cent of the authorized military staff deployed — are employed solely to protect MINUMSMA's installations and convoys. Hardly a day goes by without improvised explosive devices damaging our armoured vehicles, which are already in short supply, thereby reducing the Mission's ability to fulfil its mandate. Despite repeated appeals, we still are finding it difficult to set up the combat logistics battalion that would partly solve this problem.

In those circumstances, it must be reiterated, it is urgent to implement all the provisions of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation. Only the operationalization of joint patrols and quartering could possibly reverse the security dynamic, and even if, it should always be remembered, the roots of the conflict are political, there will be no lasting solution without the political and institutional reforms envisaged in the Agreement.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Ladsous for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Mali.

Mr. Diop (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin my statement, Mr. President, by reiterating the delegation of Mali's warm congratulations to your country, the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, on its election, on 16 October 2015, to the Security Council as a non-permanent member. It is a particular pleasure for me to see you, Sir, preside over the Security Council

in January 2016, coincidentally with the start of your country's term on this important organ dedicated to the maintenance of international peace and security.

I would also like to express the delegation of Mali's appreciation for the outstanding way in which the United States of America led the work of the Security Council last month, with, in particular, the adoption of important resolutions, including resolution 2253 (2015), on Daesh, and resolution 2258 (2015), on Syria.

I would also like to reiterate my delegation's congratulations to Egypt, Senegal, Japan and Ukraine on their elections as non-permanent members of the Security Council. The delegation of Mali would like to assure all the new members of its full and complete cooperation.

I would also like to commend Chile, Jordan, Lithuania, Nigeria and Chad, whose mandates ended on 31 December, and to express our appreciation for the extremely important role they have played in the Security Council with respect to resolving the multidimensional crisis that has affected my country, Mali, since 2012.

On behalf of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, as well as the people and the Government of Mali, I would like to pay tribute to all the members of the Security Council, non-permanent and permanent alike, and to the entire international community for their support and spirit of solidarity, from which my country has benefited during this crisis.

I would also like to reiterate our deep gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to Algeria, head of the international mediation team and Chair of the Monitoring Committee for the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, to the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the European Union, the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, France, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Nigeria, the Niger and the United States of America, which have spared no effort to restore peace and stability in Mali.

I would also like to bow reverently in memory of all the victims — civilian and military, foreign and Malian — who have lost their lives during the crisis in Mali and express our deep appreciation to the United Nations and the troop-contributing countries for all the sacrifices they have made.

The delegation of Mali thanks our dear friend Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing on the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2015/1030), which we applaud for its balanced character, its analysis of the situation on the ground and its acknowledgment of all the efforts made by the Malians — their Government, armed forces and population in general — but also its recognition of the important challenges and difficulties encountered in the implementation of the Agreement. I thank Mr. Ladsous for the report.

Before going any further, I would like to make some preliminary remarks.

First, the determination of the Government of Mali to implement the provisions of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali is firm and total. In that context, my delegation welcomes the positive momentum initiated in recent months by signatory movements that have set aside their differences.

Secondly, we must take note of the resurgence in terrorist attacks as the main obstacle to the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Terrorist groups have retaken the field and are now acting openly to intimidate communities and extending their actions to reach strategic targets, including hotels, as seen in, inter alia, the deadly attacks at the Byblos Hotel in Sévaré and the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako.

Thirdly, as mentioned previously, I would like to draw attention to the significant progress made in the implementation of the Agreement under the leadership of President Keita, despite the difficulties encountered, which are inherent in any process of this nature.

It should be recalled that, at the 6 October 2015 meeting of the Security Council (see S/PV.7528), the delegation of Mali informed the Council of the actions and initiatives its Government had undertaken in the framework of the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. These actions and initiatives continued with the support of our partners. In July, the Government prepared and submitted a plan of action, which has become the document of reference for the implementation of the Agreement. It contains a precise timetable. I am therefore pleased to add to the list of institutional actions and measures taken by Mali, which Mr. Ladsous previously reported, as follows.

In the area of economic, social and cultural development, pursuant to the Agreement, the international conference for the economic recovery and development of Mali was held on 22 October 2015 in Paris, under the joint auspices of the Government of Mali and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It was attended by representatives of the parties signatory to the Agreement, civil society, the Malian and international private sector and 64 partner countries and organizations. The opening ceremony was chaired jointly by the Heads of State of Mali and France and the Secretary-General of the OECD.

At that meeting, the Government of Mali expressed its determination to create the conditions needed to speed up growth throughout Mali and, first of all, reaffirmed its commitment to implementing a decentralization process giving the regions responsibilities and effective control of local issues and regional development. It presented the outline for a specific development strategy for the country's northern regions, as recommended in the Agreement, and announced a contribution from the Government's own resources of €451 million for the period 2016 to 2018. In addition, the Government announced the establishment of a sustainable development fund as provided for in the Agreement, which will be administered under joint and inclusive oversight and will conform to the highest standards of accountability and transparency.

The international conference for Mali's economic recovery and development was an opportunity to take stock of Mali's partners' financial pledges, which, as was just mentioned, represent a commitment of €3.2 billion for the period 2015 to 2017, including €596 million for the northern regions, based on the first announcements made during the conference. I should point out that the overall cost of the early recovery activities, poverty-reduction and development has been assessed at about €3.5 billion. I should like take this opportunity to thank all of Mali's partners, and the United Nations in particular, for mobilizing their support and commitment.

In the area of infrastructure development, the Government has already conducted an assessment of road infrastructure needs and is working to mobilize the financial resources needed for them. In that regard, I would like to note that financing is in place for the strategically important Gao-Bourem-Taoussa road, while the Kidal-Bourem section is partially funded.

Concerning basic social services, the Government has launched various efforts on the humanitarian emergency front. In the past few months we have prioritized the areas of anti-malaria response and education, for which a Government assessment team has been out in the field organizing the opening of classes, which have now begun in Kidal. We have also distributed kits to students in some schools in the Kidal region. After an absence of several years, the national electricity company, with the help and cooperation of the signatory armed groups, has installed generators in Kidal and Ménaka, and the electricity is back on. We must note that the regrettable lack of cooperation on the part of some of the signatory movements, particularly their occupation of classrooms, has interfered slightly with the smooth running of the process, but the work in this area continues.

The support arrangements consist essentially of the Comité de suivi de l'accord and its subcommittees, which are already in place and holding meetings regularly. However, the Government of Mali regrets the delays and inefficiencies in the work of that body, which has too often wasted too much time on procedural and representational questions.

On the political and institutional front, besides the measures noted in the Secretary-General's report, it should be recalled that, at the request of the Head of State, the Government has established a ministerial department dedicated to State decentralization and reform. The department is led by a native of Kidal who is familiar with the challenges that those regions are dealing with and of the importance of acting as quickly as possible to institute political and institutional reforms. A detailed plan has been drawn up in accordance both with the Government's plan of action and the timetable for implementation of the Agreement. The start of the new year is the right time for us to start to operationalize this extremely vital job.

We have also established a national coordination committee for implementing the Agreement, led by the Prime Minister and Head of Government, with the assistance of a technical secretariat. I should note here that the committee and its technical secretariat have been set up in order to help to ensure national ownership of the process by Malians and the Malian Government. The mechanism, which, as Mr. Ladsous indicated, is open to the signatory groups, will work closely with the Comité de suivi de l'accord. The Government of Mali and its technical and financial partners have also

set up a consultation mechanism designed to ensure the best possible and most transparent management of the resources for implementing the Agreement. Its first meeting took place on 24 December.

With regard to reconciliation, justice and humanitarian efforts, the main achievements in this area have been the communal dialogues, all part of a process of reconciliation between communities at the base. Since the Anéfis initiative, in which the Government played a major role and which encouraged a rapprochement and lessening of tensions among the groups, these activities have multiplied on the ground. It is also important to note that the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission has been set up and its operationalization problems resolved. In that regard, on 23 December, the Council of Ministers of the issued a decree authorizing the Commission's expansion with a view to ensuring its inclusivity.

Where defence and security are concerned, in general, the overall security situation on the ground is somewhat improved, thanks mainly to the cessation of hostilities between the parties and to the messages of peace and support to the Agreement issued regularly by all the parties. The Commission technique de sécurité provided for in the Agreement has been set up and is meeting regularly. However, the Mécanisme opérationnel de coordination is not yet operational, despite the resources that the Government has made available to it in order to speed things up. It would therefore be highly desirable to see the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) become more involved in operationalizing the joint Mécanisme opérationnel.

With regard to the commissions on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), on 29 December, as was noted just now, the Council of Ministers issued a decree on the creation, organization and operating procedures of a national commission for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, along with a similar decree for an integration commission. The texts were produced following a workshop on a draft document for a comprehensive DDR strategy and operational texts organized by the Ministry of Defence and Former Combatants, with, I should emphasize, the participation of representatives of the signatory movements. The cantonment phase, according to the Government's concept and wishes, provides for cantonment with all basic amenities. In that regard, I would like to draw the Security Council's attention to the need to speed up the cantonment process, as was also noted just now, and to urge MINUSMA to play its full part in that process and to induce the armed groups to cooperate in order to ensure that the operation is conducted successfully and on time.

Where the joint patrols are concerned, the Government of Mali was pleased with the first operation, which was carried out in November. Once again, however, we share Mr. Ladsous's opinion that more are needed. It is even more important that the Malian armed forces and MINUSMA work together to ensure better securitization of these communities. Unfortunately we find even more regrettable the lack of cooperation on the part of our brothers in the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, who claim to have neither the heavy weapons or the vehicles needed to continue with the joint patrols. However, to some extent the Government has the means to enable it to do this itself.

As we can see, tangible progress has been made by the Government in the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. However, a number of persistent challenges, in particular the threat linked to the presence of terrorist groups in northern Mali, both worries us and calls for our attention. The threat is real and constitutes the main challenge to the return of peace in Mali today. Indeed, the resurgence of terrorist activities in the north of the country is clearly aimed at halting the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation and at creating alarm within the business and investment communities, whose interest in Mali — the promise of which had been renewed following the successful Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development meeting in Paris on the country's economic recovery — had fortunately been rekindled. That is the nefarious objective of the terrorist group Ansar Dine, which has been inscribed on the sanctions list of the Security Council, as well as of its partners in the Front de libération du Macina and other terrorist groups, such as the Organization of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Al-Mourabitoun, that have claimed responsibility for a series of terrorist acts that have regrettably plunged our country and many other friendly nations into mourning.

That was the case, for example on Friday, 20 November 2015, when fanatics from a bygone era, fiercely determined to commit a heinous massacre, attacked the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako. Sadly, friends of Mali of various nationalities lost their lives in

that tragedy. Recalling those painful events, allow me to once again express the most heartfelt condolences of the people and Government of Mali to the bereaved families and nations. As the President of the Republic, Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, recalled, the reopening of the Radisson Blu Hotel on 15 December 2015 was a global symbol of resilience and rejection of terror.

The Government of Mali is fully aware that peacekeeping operations are not mandated to combat terrorism. Unfortunately, it is clear that MINUSMA now operates in an environment marked by the presence and activities of terrorist groups. In the framework of their State functions, it should be recalled that the Malian defence and security forces are on the front line in the fight against terrorism. However, given the vastness of the country and the asymmetrical nature of this war, they cannot cope with this phenomenon alone.

Today, 11 January, which marks the third anniversary of the launch of Operation Serval, provides us with the opportunity to reiterate our appreciation to France not only for its life-saving intervention in Mali, but also for the remarkable work accomplished by the Barkhane force in the fight against terrorism.

Given the persistence of the terrorist threat, I once again invite the Security Council to consider, in the framework of the review of the mandate of MINUSMA, strengthening its operational capacity with a view to adapting it to the particularly fluid and evolving security environment. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General, there is concern that

> "MINUSMA is likely to continue to face significant security challenges posed by actors outside the peace process, namely, extremist and terrorist groups and transnational drug traffickers" (*S/2015/1030, para. 60*).

In the light of this situation, which poses a threat to international peace and security, I reiterate the desire expressed many times by the Heads of State and Governments of African regional and subregional entities to establish a rapid intervention force to combat terrorism by pooling the efforts of countries of the region. Our concern is all the greater as we fear unrest throughout the region due to interaction, or even possible cooperation between the various terrorist groups operating in the Sahel, in particular in northern Mali — several of which I have just mentioned — as well as in Libya, where the presence of the Islamic State is now a reality, and in the Lake Chad Basin, where Boko Haram conducts its deadly operations.

We must take the threat of terrorism in the Sahel region very seriously. Being selective in our fight against terrorism would be a grave mistake. Acts of terrorism of any kind are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of the motivation, time or place of commission, or the perpetrators. That is why the delegation of Mali welcomed the 17 December 2015 adoption of resolution 2253 (2015) concerning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, inter alia, and invites the Security Council to consider taking stronger measures against the terrorist groups operating in the Sahelo-Saharan region.

The obscurantists who attacked the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako; who took so many lives at the Bataclan in Paris; who wrought havoc in San Bernardino, California; and who have claimed so many innocent victims elsewhere around the world are, unfortunately, all driven by the same ideology of hatred that would subject human beings to an inhumane order. These lawless, faithless individuals have nothing to do with the religion of Muhammad, which is above all a religion of peace, humanism, respect for others and peaceful coexistence among people that advocates the preservation of the sacred nature of of humankind and human life. We are of the firm conviction that nothing, absolutely nothing, can justify terrorism. No cause can justify this scourge, which has no country, religion or border. We must show exemplary solidarity and unity in the face of this phenomenon. Only then will we be able to proclaim loudly that terror will not triumph. We are convinced that, united, we will defeat terrorism.

I cannot conclude without thanking my friend, Mr. Mongi Hamdi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MINUSMA, who is about to step down from his position after a year of intense activity that culminated in the conclusion of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, among others. I commend him for the work he has accomplished as Head of MINUSMA and wish him, on behalf of the Government of Mali, every success in his new role.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate my brother and friend, Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif, a seasoned diplomat with extensive peacekeeping experience, on his selection to head MINUSMA. I express the full readiness of the Government of Mali to work with him on the

accelerated implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and, above all, on ensuring the success of his mission, which is of necessity the success of the Malian people.

As 2016 begins, I would like to wish the members of the Security Council a happy new year. May this new year see the efforts of the international community in its fight against terrorism and the restoration of peace and stability in the world, be crowned with success.

Finally, on quite another matter, in the light of all the advances made in my country thanks to the presence of the United Nations Mission, I would like to invite the Security Council to request the Secretariat to conduct an in-depth study with a view to the development of a exit strategy for MINUSMA. This is not premature. We believe that any operation should allow for the consideration of an eventual exit. Beginning to reflect on the matter now would allow us to better to assess what capacities to develop, what resources to make available, and what strategies to employ to ensure a much faster transition to the Malian defence and security forces.

The idea is to gradually draw down MINUSMA as a number of milestones are reached. It will then gradually be replaced by the State and its rebuilt defence and security forces within the framework of our sovereign mission to ensure peace and stability in our country. That is the objective that we wish to share with the Council in an effort to offer constructive inputs as we look towards the future. Once again, we wish to express our tremendous gratitude for all the efforts that have been made and continue to be made to help our country. As partners and friends, we believe that it is important for us to think ahead about the ways in which we can best support the efforts being made to assist Mali.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite Council members to hold informal consultations to continue the discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7601

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7601st meeting

Wednesday, 13 January 2016, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Bermúdez	(Uruguay)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Mahmoud
	France	Mr. Bertoux
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in Côte d'Ivoire

Thirty-seventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2015/940)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-00603 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Côte d'Ivoire

Thirty-seventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2015/940)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Côte d'Ivoire to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Aïchatou Mindaoudou Souleymane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/940, which contains the thirty-seventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Ms. Mindaoudou.

Ms. Mindaoudou (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Council today on the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2015/940) and to inform it about major recent developments in the country, including the presidential election of 25 October 2015 and the challenges that remain to be addressed.

Since the last time I briefed the Council (see S/PV.7459), Côte d'Ivoire has dealt with a huge challenge — the holding of a presidential election. The people of Côte d'Ivoire voted peacefully and re-elected President Alassane Ouattara to a second term. The voting, conducted in an atmosphere of calm, has given the people of Côte d'Ivoire the opportunity to definitively turn the page on the previous political crisis, begin a new chapter in their country's history and consolidate the progress they have made towards long-term stability. Despite the withdrawal of three candidates and the arrest and detention of several persons for organizing unauthorized political gatherings and demonstrations, the national authorities, including the security forces, proved that they were capable of taking charge of the organization and safeguarding of the voting process. I would like to take this opportunity to once again commend the efforts of the Independent Electoral Commission to ensure that the election was held without any major problems, and to thank all of Côte d'Ivoire's bilateral and multilateral partners for their technical, financial and logistical support.

In the run-up to the presidential election of 25 October, through my good offices, the Government and the opposition parties resumed a productive dialogue, which helped to ensure an environment conducive to the holding of a peaceful election. In that regard, I would like to commend the Government for its efforts to respond to the opposition's demands ahead of the election. The implementation of the mission mandate and my good offices through dedicated forums enabled us to engage civil society, traditional, religious and community leaders, youth groups and women's associations in working tirelessly to ensure an atmosphere conducive to a free and democratic presidential election.

Côte d'Ivoire is now the second-largest economy in West Africa, which represents a remarkable recovery. It is now hoped that the people of Côte d'Ivoire will fully enjoy the dividends of the economic growth. National reconciliation, however, lags behind economic recovery. In this regard, I welcome President Ouattara's statement in which he indicated his determination to make national reconciliation a priority of his second term. Without losing time, on 7 December 2015 President Ouattara began his consultation on the subject with the executive committee of the chamber of traditional kings and chiefs of Côte D'Ivoire, and met with religious leaders and representatives of the National Commission for Reconciliation and Compensation of Victims in Côte d'Ivoire. Further to these consultations, President Ouattara granted presidential pardon to 3,100 prisoners, including some from the post-electoral crisis.

Progress in the prosecution of alleged perpetrators of crimes committed during the post-electoral crisis remains slow. I urge the Government to complete the investigations of the Special Investigation and Examination Cell so as to create the conditions to prosecute all those alleged to have committed serious

abuses and violations of human rights, regardless of their political affiliation.

I note the growing participation of women in public forums and seminars, whether as representatives of their political parties or in order to voice their concerns on matters of national interest. This trend augurs well for the increased participation of women in future elections and ultimately in decision-making positions. I note the Government's intention to make women's empowerment a priority during the President's second term. A great deal of effort has gone into the prevention of sexual- and gender-based violence and support for victims, but the prosecution of alleged perpetrators remains hesitant. The strengthening of the judicial system to properly address such cases in a timely manner is critical if such behaviour is to be curbed for good.

Ensuring security throughout the national territory during the electoral process was a test for the Ivorian security forces. Despite some shortcomings, the national police, endarmerie and armed forces met the challenge. To maintain this momentum, it is important that the law on the organization of the defence sector and the armed forces of Côte d'Ivoire, adopted by the National Assembly on 9 March, be promulgated. This legislation is an important step towards the transformation of the security sector, in particular the professionalization and accountability of the army. Furthermore, efforts to gradually reduce the gender gap and to restore the confidence of the population must be maintained.

The Government of Côte d'Ivoire has completed its disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, as it had planned. However, the continued support of Côte d'Ivoire's bilateral and multilateral partners will be necessary to support reinsertion programmes for the residual caseload of combatants, with a view to translating reinsertion into long-term reintegration.

The security situation in Côte d'Ivoire remains stable, with violent crimes still on the downward trend since the Secretary-General issued his last report (S/2015/320). During the electoral period, no serious security incidents were reported by the population or the candidates. However, armed robberies and banditry, as well as threats of terrorist attacks, remain a challenge. An attack claimed by the terrorist group Ansar Dine in southern Mali, close to the border with Côte D'Ivoire, prompted the Government to deploy its security forces along the border with Mali. In that regard, UNOCI deployed its quick-reaction force in June and July to support the military operation undertaken by the Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI) along the border.

Threats of cross-border attacks remain, particularly along the Liberian border, where the most recent attack on two FRCI posts on 2 December resulted in the deaths of seven FRCI soldiers and injuries to four assailants, and along the Ghanaian border, where an attack on a FRCI post on 27 December resulted in two arrests but no casualties. The Ivorian Government is increasingly capable of addressing immediate and latent security threats, domestic and external alike. Its effectiveness, however, hinges on the adequate equipping and resourcing of the police, the security forces and the army.

The land border between Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia remains closed as a precaution against the Ebola virus disease, but information-sharing between the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and UNOCI has continued. Humanitarian corridors were also opened on 18 and 22 December 2015 to allow for the voluntary repatriation of Ivorian refugees from Liberia, facilitated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Liberia, Mr. Zarif, and I witnessed the departure and arrival of refugees on 18 December 2015.

Pursuant to resolution 2226 (2015), the authorized strength of the UNOCI military component stands at 5,437, and that of the police at 1,500. Taking into account the successful conduct of the 2015 presidential election, the improving security situation on the ground and the growing capacity of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to ensure security in the country, UNOCI is ready to implement the provisions of paragraph 65 of the Secretary-General's report of 15 May 2014 (S/2014/342). This will entail the further reduction of the UNOCI force to slightly fewer than 4,000 troops by 31 March. A strategic review team will deploy in February for the purpose of developing recommendations on the further downsizing of UNOCI military and police, and the future of the mission, as requested by the Council.

Challenges remain in Côte d'Ivoire, notwithstanding the successful holding of the presidential election and the improving security situation on the ground. The ongoing national reconciliation process; the strengthening of the security sector, in particular the reform of the army and the police; the sustainable reinsertion and reintegration of former combatants; and improvements in the human rights situation and in transitional justice are all key

challenges facing Côte d'Ivoire on the path to durable stability, as is the holding of legislative elections in December. The Ivorian institutions will have the complex task of organizing and securing an electoral process involving hundreds of candidates all over the country. These elections are crucial, and should involve the full political spectrum in Cote d'Ivoire, as they will be an opportunity for the opposition to participate and secure seats in the National Assembly in the context of a vibrant democracy.

In all of these issues, the combined support of the Security Council, Member States, international and regional partners, and the United Nations system remains essential to the Côte D'Ivoire's ability to complete all these key processes without delay. I thank the Security Council once again for its invaluable support to the implementation of the UNOCI mandate.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Mindaoudou for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Bouah-Kamon (Côte D'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset, Sir, to reiterate the congratulations of my Government on the election of your country to the Security Council as a non-permanent member, as well as on your first month in the Council and your accession to its presidency. It is my great pleasure to note that your country now chairs the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1572 (2004), concnering Côte d'Ivoire. I am delighted by this appointment and assure you of my country's full cooperation to ensure the success that the Council has just conferred upon you. I take this opportunity to express also our great admiration for Chile and Ambassador Cristián Barros Melet, who has admirably chaired the work of the Committee in recent years.

I also wish to convey my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, Ms. Aïchatou Mindaoudou, and her team for their outstanding work in cooperation with the Ivorian authorities and French forces in Côte d'Ivoire. My delegation takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/940).

In 2015, political life in Côte d'Ivoire was marked by the organization of the presidential election. The election took place on 30 October 2015, and turnout was 51.86 per cent. According to national and international observers, the vote was free, transparent, fair and inclusive. Following the count, the candidate Alassane Ouattara obtained 83.88 per cent of the votes cast and was immediately congratulated by the other candidates in a spirit of republicanism and fair play. Thus, the presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire took place in a very peaceful and almost cordial political context, reflecting the resolve of the Ivorian people to turn its back once and for all on the past in order to focus on progress and development. This success should be attributed to the Ivorians themselves, and above all the political class and the people. It is also the fruit of exemplary cooperation among the United Nations system, the French forces and the Ivorian authorities. The Government of Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its gratitude to the French forces and to the agencies and forces of the United Nations in Côte d'Ivoire.

At his inauguration, the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Alassane Ouattara, announced the main areas of reform of this five-year term and underscored the attention he will focus in this final term in office on national reconciliation and the adoption of a new constitution to guarantee equality for all, national cohesion and institutional stability. Putting his words into action, the President of the Republic has started initial consultations to that end. In December 2015, in an atmosphere of great openness, he met with representatives of the traditional chiefs, whose proposals were very important to him, and he pledged to consider them very carefully. In the same spirit and at the same time, he also met with the National Commission for Reconciliation and Compensation of Victims and with religious leaders, and commended their contribution to the smooth running of the presidential election. In his new year message to the nation, the Head of State decided to release about 3,100 prisoners, many of whom had been detained following the post-electoral crisis of 2011. He contributed thereby to reducing tension within the political climate in the country.

The success of the presidential election, like the social and political context in which it took place, embodies the dynamic of progress made over recent years on many fronts, in particular reconciliation, which I mentioned earlier; the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme; and reform of the judicial system and the security sector. The DDR operation was completed on 30 June 2015, in line with the stipulated time table. That process resulted in the collection of 39,279 weapons, including 35,628 assault rifles, Kalashnikovs and grenades; 3,651 shells and rockets; and 3,277,000 munitions. The reintegration

programme has to date assisted 57,514 former combattants, out of 74,068 in the 2012 database. That is an implementation rate of 94 per cent for this project.

In terms of resource mobilization, I underscore that, of a total of 84,740,953 CFA francs necessary for the financing of the DDR process, 20,346,932 CFA francs have been collected from partners. That is 24 per cent of the total resources earmarked for Côte d'Ivoire. Given these remarkable results, the National Authority for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration has been replaced by a more flexible structure, the Coordination and Social Reintegration Cell, under the National Security Council, responsible for assisting and guiding former combatants.

The reform of the justice sector is also under way with a view, inter alia, to facilitating access to justice for all, completing the post-crisis judicial procedures, combating impunity and ensuring more effective protection for human rights. On behalf of my Government, I wish to thank the United States of America, France and the European Union, which have stood beside us in this important reform.

Reforms undertaken in the security sector for the period 2012-2016 have already shown promising signs of success. Of the 93 reforms that need to be implemented, 34 were completed by late September 2015, representing an implementation rate is 31.62 per cent. To date, 44 reforms are being implemented and 12 remain to be started. The security index over a three-year period decreased from 3.2 to 1.11 in 2015, enabling Côte d'Ivoire to achieve a satisfactory level that is likely to guarantee its stability and development. My Government reiterates its request for the total lifting of the arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire in order to ensure that our defence and security forces can be properly equipped so as to better monitor our borders, particularly in the west.

The outstanding progress implemented on the ground, to which I referred earlier, and the restored stability lead us to anticipate the time when my country can be removed from the agenda of the Security Council under Chapter VII so that, as the President of the Republic said in his latest message to the nation, we can return in the very near future to the traditional relations of a country at peace with our shared Organization.

The announced participation of the so-called radical opposition in the upcoming legislative elections confirms once again the return to a peaceful political climate and that democracy and peace have taken root in Côte d'Ivoire. My Government therefore believes that the end of 2017, and if necessary 2018, will be a propitious and perfectly feasible deadline for the withdrawal of UNOCI. My country is confident that the United Nations country team, bolstered by its experience on the ground and its acquired skills, is perfectly qualified to continue, if necessary, residual activities. With regard to security and defence matters, the exemplary cooperation between the Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire and the international forces has allowed the Ivorian Army to strengthen its capabilities and ensure the security of the country.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my gratitude to the members of the Security Council and to wish everyone a happy new year in 2016.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7602

Security Council

Distr.: General
13 January 2016

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 7602nd (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 13 January 2016, at 3 p.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 13 January 2016, the Security Council, pursuant to annex II, sections A and B of resolution 1353 (2001), held its 7602nd meeting in private with the troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus.

"The President invited Ms. Lisa Buttenheim, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, to participate in the meeting in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

"The Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries heard a briefing by Ms. Buttenheim.

"Members of the Council, Ms. Buttenheim and representatives of participating contributing countries had an exchange of views."

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United Nations S/PV.7603

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7603rd meeting

Thursday, 14 January 2016, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Rosselli	(Uruguay)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Zhao Yong
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2015/1031)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-00735 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2015/1031)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to participate in this meeting. On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. Sidikou, who is joining today's meeting via video teleconference from Goma.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/1031, which contains the the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I now give the floor to Mr. Sidikou.

Mr. Sidikou (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I will brief the Council in person next March but, given the prevailing situation in the country, it seemed appropriate that I remain in the Mission area for today's briefing.

My briefing will focus on three issues, namely, the evolution of the political situation in relation to the national elections scheduled for later this year, recent trends in security in the east of the country, and the planned withdrawal of some of the troops of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I will try to make recommendations to the Council on each of those issues.

(*spoke in English*)

The presidential and legislative elections scheduled for November of this year are a deeply divisive issue, particularly given the continued absence of an agreed electoral calendar or a budget for the elections. The formal preparations for a national dialogue, announced by President Kabila as a means to forge consensus on the electoral process, have not yet begun, in part due to strong opposition against the initiative by many major opposition groups.

President Kabila is continuing consultations, including with the United Nations and the African Union, on the designation of an international facilitator for the national dialogue. During my meetings with the President, I have expressed the readiness of MONUSCO to support an inclusive Congolese process guided by the country's Constitution. In that context, it is encouraging to note that, at the end of December, the Catholic Bishops Conference met separately with leaders of the majority and opposition parties, the Electoral Commission and civil society representatives to seek their views on reviving the electoral process. I understand that all participants agreed on the need for some form of dialogue. I am continuing my contacts with the committee established by the Bishops Conference to support further confidence-building efforts and encourage a way forward. However, many of my interlocutors have expressed scepticism that the rift between the majority and the opposition can be bridged, potentially leading to delays in the electoral calendar.

In the absence of agreement on the electoral process, political polarization has heightened tensions and contributed to an atmosphere of increased harassment and human rights violations. Since last year, MONUSCO has registered more than 260 human rights violations related to elections, mostly against opposition members, civil society representatives and journalists. That, combined with the rising number of human rights abuses by armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, illustrates a worrying trend of narrowing political space and a real challenge to the conduct of peaceful, credible elections. However, in other areas where there have been longstanding human rights concerns, it is important to acknowledge the significant steps taken by the Congolese authorities. For example, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du

Congo (FARDC) completed 20 trials in the past three months, finding 19 officers guilty of rape. For the past nine months, the FARDC has supported the commission overseeing the action plan against sexual violence, to which President Kabila recommitted his support last December.

Turning to the security situation, there has been a significant deterioration in the eastern part of the country in recent weeks, particularly in the Beni and Lubero territories of North Kivu, where activities by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the Force démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), among other groups, pose ongoing and serious threats to the civilian populations. In the Beni territory, the ADF has been the target of operations by the FARDC under Sukola I operations for the past two years. Nonetheless, the ADF remains able to coordinate simultaneous attacks on the FARDC and MONUSCO. The Council will recall that more than 500 civilians have been killed by the ADF and its allies since 2014, and since December of last year there have been 45,000 newly displaced civilians.

That situation continues today, with some people displaced as far north as Ituri province, with ongoing tensions among the communities on the ground. MONUSCO has responded against suspected ADF locations, including a 1 December 2014 aerial operation following ADF attacks around Eringeti and Makembi. The Mission has taken immediate steps to strengthen the protection of civilians through increased joint police and military patrols, and the redeployment of an additional company operating base of the Force Intervention Brigade, along with increased outreach and early warning activities.

On 4 and 5 December, I visited Beni to meet with local authorities and civil society to assess options for further action. I returned to the area on 12 December with a delegation of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region to engage their diplomatic support. I have also encouraged the Government at the highest levels to engage directly on this serious issue. President Kabila's recent visit to the east is a positive sign in that regard.

Since October, FARDC Sukola II operations have intensified against the FDLR in Lubero and bordering territories. That has been accompanied by an increase in Mayi-Mayi operations against the FDLR and its allies. Civilians have been caught up in the fighting and have been displaced, forcibly abducted or targeted for massacres or harassment, often on the basis of ethnicity and perceived collaboration with the FDLR. Reprisal attacks by suspected FDLR elements have been reported, most recently on 7 January in Miriki, southern Lubero, where displaced members of the Hutu community had sought refuge. At least 18 people were killed in the attack, mostly women and children from the Nande community. The situation appears to be worsening in Lubero, and could potentially turn into an open inter-ethnic conflict between the Hutu and Nande communities. That dynamic could easily spark violence in adjoining territories where competition over land and customary authority has already heightened tensions. Reports of increased recruitment into self-defence groups based on ethnicity are a worrying sign, and the upcoming elections period could serve to further politicize and instrumentalize the groups on the ground.

MONUSCO is engaged with the Government and the FARDC command to encourage increased military pressure on local militia in North Kivu and to cooperate with a view to bringing about increased voluntary disarmament. That, in combination with ongoing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes and political engagement to resolve conflict, is a key priority for the Mission in the coming period. Increased early warning activities to ensure the effective protection of civilians in this area are also a key priority.

The crisis in Burundi has produced new risks of renewed instability in South Kivu. Already there are 13,000 refugees from Burundi sheltering in the camp of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Uvira territory, and a new flow of refugees into the country has been reported. The Mission has received worrisome reports of infiltrations by armed elements into this province, with local actors expressing fears that some groups are trying to establish rear bases in Uvira and Fizi territories. We will continue to closely monitor the situation along the border and the impact of the Burundian crisis on Democratic Republic of the Congo, to ensure that appropriate contingency plans are in place.

The Council is well aware of the proposed reduction of MONUSCO's force by 1,700 troops. I am ready to address questions regarding how the reduction will be taken forward, in close coordination with the Government via a strategic dialogue and in line with resolution 2211 (2015). In that regard, I would

highlight that the drawdown will be accompanied by a process of force transformation, which will ensure that MONUSCO exercises greater operational capability in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, even as the force gradually reduces in overall numbers. The key goal is to continue to project force and to be able to protect civilians as the number of static sites decreases. The core of the force transformation is rapid deployment capability, delivered by rapid reaction brigades, which will start deployment into MONUSCO next month. That, combined with greater air reconnaissance and operational capabilities, is designed to ensure responsiveness, agility and the ability to take forward a robust strategy to protect civilians in the coming period.

In conclusion, I would like to draw the Council's attention to three areas where strong messaging and engagement would be particularly useful.

First, given the very real risks of civil unrest and violence related to the electoral process, it is critical that every effort be made to rebuild confidence among the stakeholders to find a way forward. I would encourage the Council to support an inclusive dialogue that upholds the Constitution. Such a process should build confidence among the citizens, ease political tensions, reduce the risk of escalation and contribute to an atmosphere conducive to the protection of the fundamental freedoms guaranteed under the Constitution.

Secondly, there is a window of opportunity now to deepen our partnership with Governments and move towards a common vision and joint approach to addressing insecurity in the east of the country. I have received clear signals of this from President Kabila himself and others in the Government. I believe it is important that every effort be made to work collaboratively with the FARDC and State authorities to meet the many challenges and protect civilians at this difficult time. The resumption of security cooperation would be a key aspect in that regard, and could lead to meaningful reductions in the capabilities and influence of armed groups in the east. The Council's encouragement of such an approach would be particularly useful at this time.

Thirdly, regarding the Mission's force reduction and transformation, I am confident that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO will soon resume structured and meaningful discussions within the framework of the strategic dialogue in order to agree on ways to effectively implement MONUSCO's mandate and jointly develop an exit strategy. The Council's continued support for such an approach will be important, particularly upon entering the mandate renewal discussions in March.

(*spoke in French*)

In conclusion, I thank the Security Council and the Member States for their active support to MONUSCO. I also express my gratitude to all the personnel of the Mission and of the United Nations who are working in difficult and at times dangerous conditions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that regard, I pay solemn tribute to Staff Sergeant Dyson Mayao, of Malawi, who lost his life last year serving in the Force Intervention Brigade tasked with protecting civilians against attacks in the city of Erengeti.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Sidikou for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): First and foremost, I wish to congratulate Uruguay' on its accession to presidency of the Security Council and commend the great skill with which you, Sir, have led the Council since the beginning of the month.

My delegation also commends the leadership of Ambassador Samantha Power, Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, in the Council in December last year. Finally, I wish to pay tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, to whom my country owes so much for his remarkable and tireless efforts to ensure that peace returns to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

My delegation notes the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), as contained in document S/2015/1031, the content of which we fully appreciate. With your kind indulgence, Mr. President, I shall briefly touch on a number of points contained in the report before us today, including the elections, the inclusive national dialogue, armed groups, the implementation of the Nairobi Declarations and the strategic dialogue.

As underscored in paragraph 9 of the Secretary-General's report, the electoral process in my country seems to be experiencing some delay but, as was

eloquently recalled by His Excellency Mr. Raymond Tshibanda N'tungamulongo, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation when he spoke at the General Assembly in September (see A/70/PV.24), the Democratic Republic of the Congo is committed to organizing general elections, which will be the third after those held in 2006 and 2011, even though the road towards the elections may seem to be strewn with obstacles. Despite such challenges, my Government will do all in its power to meet the challenge of organizing elections that meet all international standards of inclusivity, transparency and credibility.

Nevertheless, I am compelled to recall that, following the political intolerance and the failure of the losers to accept the results before, during and after the 2006 and 2011 elections, my country experienced deadly violence that led to loss of human life and property. In a bid to avert a recurrence of that situation, His Excellency Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Republic, engaged the country in national dialogue so that our political stakeholders, civil society, and religious and traditional authorities could agree together on the ways and means that would enable us to overcome the obstacles we face with a view to achieving consensus on the electoral process under way, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Constitution. In that regard, let me touch on the fact that the aforementioned obstacles are linked first and foremost with the electoral list, which has raised some questions on its reliability and inclusiveness.

While there is no guarantee to date that all Congolese of voting age are on the electoral list — as illustrated by the problems with those who have recently reached voting age, Congolese living abroad and refugees returning home — at the same time there is nothing to prove that all names on the list are there legitimately. The International Organization of la Francophonie, which audited the list, recognized the need to update it. Therefore, after considering the options, the consensus is either to have elections based on a flawed voters list — which could lead to the election results being challenged — or to address the flaws of the list ahead of the process and reduce the risk as much as possible.

The second obstacle is the electoral calendar. Admittedly, there is a general calendar that includes the organization of elections at all levels. However, as the Head of State pointed out in his speech to the nation when he announced the convening of the inclusive national dialogue, that calendar is not operational at this point because of the multiple dissenting opinions within the political establishment. Indeed, before it was published the calendar was demanded by the opposition, which then promptly challenged it. The differences concerning the calendar have never been resolved, to the point that the initial voting planned for October did not take place.

The third obstacle is providing secure conditions for the elections. The elections of 2006 and 2011 were marred by violence in certain constituencies. Indeed, in 2006 the highest adjudicatory body, the Supreme Court of Justice, was torched, and following that election, a war broke out in Kinshasa in 2007 that led to the loss of several lives because the results were not accepted. A very similar situation arose in 2011, when violence broke out in Kinshasa and several other cities and towns in the country before, during and after elections because of altercations between activists of rival political parties. Beyond providing physical and material security for the candidates and voters, the problem at this level is that of the role that should be played by the political establishment in promoting an environment conducive to a peaceful election process.

The fourth obstacle is the funding of the electoral process. Funding the process also requires some dialogue. So far, the National Independent Electoral Commission has forwarded to all stakeholders in the electoral process a budget equivalent to $1.2 billion to finance the entire electoral process. For 2016, the Government has published a draft financing bill with an appropriation to the tune of $500 million, which is less than half of the aforementioned budget, and with the caveat that we can only disburse tens of millions of dollars per month, while our current capacity to mobilize revenue does not allow for that.

To prevent a crisis arising from the failure to resolve all those problems responsibly, good sense recommends that we sit down together around the table and talk — hence, the need for the dialogue among Congolese. Dialogue is a virtue that we cannot avoid in democracy. Other voices — such as those of the Secretary-General, His Holiness Pope Francis, and the Episcopal Conference of the Congo, composed of all bishops of the Catholic Church in the country — have also called for dialogue.

Having thus consulted every sector of Congolese society, which has largely acknowledged the importance and necessity of organizing a national dialogue, and having recognized the urgent need, expressed by many,

to ensure that this dialogue is supported by international facilitation, on 17 November 2015 the President of the Republic asked the Secretary-General to appoint a facilitator. We are awaiting that appointment so that we can get started on our dialogue.

As noted in the Secretary-General's report, my Government has put considerable effort into combating the armed groups. In the Sukola I operations, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), with the support of MONUSCO, continued to pursue the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) with the aim of securing Beni and the surrounding area. The FARDC also led similar operations against the Forces de résistance patriotiques de l'Ituri. Both these and the ADF operations are supported by MONUSCO. In December, in order to assess the situation on the ground, the Head of State, as Supreme Commander of the Congolese armed forces, made an inspection tour that took him to Goma and Beni, in North Kivu, and then to Bukavu, in South Kivu. Since then the necessary arrangements have been made to ensure that those operations continue smoothly.

Regarding the Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda (FDLR), the FARDC's operations against that negative force have continued in the areas of Lubero, Rutshuru and Walikale, in North Kivu, and in the Itombwe forest, in South Kivu, and have weakened it, enabling us to arrest Ladislas Ntangazwa, a perpetrator of genocide, on 8 December. In that regard, I recall my Government's position concerning the FDLR ex-combatants and their families who are cantoned in transit sites. While we are grateful to the United Nations for taking charge of them, as we had asked, my Government would again like to see greater involvement on the part of the international community in general, and the Security Council in particular, in repatriating the ex-combatants to Rwanda or quickly resettling them in a third country outside the Great Lakes region.

Regarding the former Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the delay in implementing the Nairobi Declarations, the assessment made at the Security Council's meeting on 8 October 2015 (see S/PV.7529) still stands. As the Secretary-General emphasizes in paragraphs 35 and 36 of his report, no progress has been made in repatriating former M-23 combatants, owing mainly, as was also noted at the last meeting, to the bad faith of the leaders of the former M-23. Despite the appeal made at the special meeting of defence ministers of member countries of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, held in Luanda on 20 October, urging all those involved to help to speed up repatriation of former M-23 combatants, the situation remains unchanged. After two meetings, held in Kinshasa on 18 November and in Kampala from 3 to 7 December, aimed at agreeing on a repatriation plan following the expiration of the time allowed, only 12 of the 1,763 former M-23 combatants in Uganda agreed to be repatriated, making for a total of 194 repatriated from Uganda since December 2014.

We can say without fear of contradiction that as of today, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is alone in implementing the Nairobi Declarations. The former M-23 combatants, held hostage by their command, refuse to respect their commitments and continue to reject voluntary repatriation despite our President's offer to mitigate it by allowing unconditional repatriation first to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration sites and subsequent reintegration to communities of the former combatants' choice. My Government believes firmly that, as the Secretary-General states in paragraph 81 of his report,

> "[t]he full and timely implementation of the Nairobi Declarations and, particularly, the repatriation of the ex-M-23 elements cantoned in Rwanda and Uganda, are critical for peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region".

My Government's view, therefore, is that the Security Council should consider instituting sanctions against the former M-23 leadership, in accordance with the decision made by the Heads of States signatories to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region when they met in New York on September 29 2015 as part of the sixth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Framework. It is also important that the countries that are sheltering them be encouraged to translate their commitments into action and find lasting political solutions to the obstacles to repatriating these former combatants and rehabilitating and reintegrating them into the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The strategic dialogue is ongoing and significant progress has been made in bilateral discussions between my Government and the United Nations. In that regard, I should point out that the Congolese Government, which remains committed to continuing discussions with the United Nations in a spirit of mutual trust, is hoping that

the dialogue will result in a good outcome that, among other things, will enable us to intensify our pursuit of the negative forces still operating in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to resume our joint operations against the FDLR, in accordance with MONUSCO's mandate. In that context, my delegation commends the Secretary-General's recommendations to the Security Council, in his letter of 16 December 2015 (S/2015/983) addressed to the President of the Council for the month of December, on the review of MONUSCO's mandate coming up in March, especially where reducing the Mission's military strength and improving its effectiveness are concerned.

In conclusion, my Government has taken note of the Secretary-General's comments. We welcome and greatly appreciate the assistance and sacrifices of the international community in general, and the peacekeepers of MONUSCO and the Force Intervention Brigade in particular, aimed at preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country and ensuring peace and stability for our people. Lastly, my delegation would like to express the gratitude of the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Security Council for its dedication to our country, and to offer the Council our best wishes for 2016 at the beginning of this new year.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7604

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7604th meeting

Thursday, 14 January 2016, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Rosselli	(Uruguay)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Zhao Yong
	Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

Peace consolidation in West Africa

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa (S/2015/1012)

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16-00741 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peace consolidation in West Africa

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa (S/2015/1012)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/1012, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa.

I now give the floor to Mr. Chambas.

Mr. Chambas: I am pleased to be here today to brief the Security Council on the situation in West Africa and the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA). Further to the sixteenth report (S/2015/1012) of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa, which is before the Council, I would like to highlight a few issues and to update members on the most recent developments.

There were a number of key political developments in West Africa in the past six months. Peaceful and credible elections were held in several countries.

In Burkina Faso, the transitional institutions ensured the holding of the presidential and legislative elections in a timely manner, despite the challenges that emerged following the failed coup d'état of 16 September. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my congratulations to the people and the leaders of Burkina Faso for their exemplary conduct and peaceful and responsible participation during the polling. The inauguration of President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré marked a successful end to the transition period.

In Guinea, a dialogue process supported by the United Nations in coordination with regional and international actors enabled the holding of presidential elections in accordance with constitutional deadlines. The peaceful holding of the elections, which resulted in the re-election of President Alpha Condé, constitutes an important milestone in the country's process of democratic consolidation.

Peaceful elections were also conducted in Côte d'Ivoire, resulting in the re-election of the incumbent, President Alassane Ouattara.

With regard to Nigeria, I am encouraged by the establishment of a new Government and by its commitment to actively combating corruption. That will contribute to the creation of an environment that will allow the country to realize its full economic potential.

Those developments demonstrate the democratic resolve of the peoples of West Africa.

As Council members are aware, five presidential elections are scheduled to take place in 2016 — in Benin, Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Ghana and the Niger. In the lead-up to those elections, I will continue to call on all national stakeholders to utilize dialogue to resolve outstanding elections-related issues so as to create a conducive environment for the holding of peaceful, credible and inclusive elections.

Violent extremism and terrorist activities remain a major threat to security and development in West Africa, further aggravating the region's humanitarian challenges. While some progress has been made in the fight against Boko Haram, that terrorist group continues its indiscriminate attacks against civilians, not only in Nigeria but also in the Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Boko Haram continues to adapt its tactics and is increasingly resorting to using young boys and girls to engage in suicide attacks. In response, countries in the region have intensified their efforts to combat those terrorist tricks and have improved cooperation in areas such as intelligence-sharing.

As they conduct military operations against the group, it is critical that they maintain adherence to international human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law. It is also critical for countries of West and Central Africa to work on development strategies that address the root causes of the insurgency, notably the

underlying socioeconomic grievances of marginalized communities. In that regard, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Bathily and I are working to ensure that the expected Lake Chad Basin Commission summit and the joint summits of the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States take place as soon as possible.

There has also been some progress in the area of security sector reform (SSR). The new United Nations senior security reform adviser, who was recently appointed by the Secretary-General to support President Alpha Condé of Guinea in his efforts to advance the implementation of SSR, is already working intensely with the President and his Government. At the President's request, the technical follow-up commission and all five technical sector committees on SSR, led by the senior SSR adviser, have resumed the holding of regular meetings.

Concerning drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, in November I chaired a meeting of the high-level policy committee of the West Africa Coast Initiative. I was pleased to note the commitment of countries in the region to fight that scourge. Transnational organized crime units in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia have been conducting effective joint investigations, while the unit in Côte d'Ivoire is working to become operational shortly. Regrettably, progress has been slower in the area of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The interregional coordination centre in Yaoundé, inaugurated in September 2014, is still not fully operational, and the coordination centre covering Togo, Benin, the Niger and Nigeria has yet to receive staff, funding and equipment. We continue to urge all partners to intensify their cooperation in this matter.

We welcome with satisfaction the news that there are no more active Ebola cases in the region. In that regard, I would like to pay tribute to the national, subregional, regional and international actors that contributed to that achievement. At present, the task of rehabilitating essential services calls for our undivided attention. The epidemic has dramatically served to expose the fragility of national health systems and to highlight the importance of effective governance. Its repercussions will continue to be felt in the form of secondary fatalities due to inadequate capacities and loss of livelihoods, which have compounded an economic crisis in countries already severely affected by the decline in commodity prices.

I salute the resilience of the people of West Africa in overcoming adversity, and their commitment to uphold democratic principles. I want to assure members that UNOWA will not relent in supporting their efforts towards enhanced democracy and sustainable development. In the light of the support of the Security Council, which has consistently contributed to our engagement, I am confident that the United Nations will continue to remain a most relevant partner to the countries and institutions of the West African region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Chambas for his briefing.

I now invite the Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.15 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7605

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7605th meeting
Friday, 15 January 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rosselli	(Uruguay)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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16-00863 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Kang.

Ms. Kang: On behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, I have the honour to deliver the following briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

For more than four years, the humanitarian community, including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, sounded the alarm about the impact of Syria's conflict on ordinary men, women and children. We have written scores of reports, given numerous briefings and made countless statements describing the brutality, desperation and destitution facing Syria's people. We have requested, called for, insisted — even demanded — that the conflict be brought to an end, that civilians be protected from the relentless violence and that access be granted for life-saving humanitarian assistance. Our requests have mostly gone unanswered, and the people of Syria continue to live in a nightmarish reality dictated by a conflict that respects few rules and obeys no laws.

In recent days, harrowing images of malnutrition and hunger from the Syrian town of Madaya have shocked the world's conscience. Regrettably, the use of siege and starvation as a weapon of war has become routine and systematic in Syria, with devastating consequences for civilians. The barbarity of this tactic cannot be overstated. By besieging civilian towns and villages, the parties to the conflict have launched a vicious war on ordinary men, women and children, with callous indifference for their lives, health and well-being. A siege that denies people access to the basic necessities of life is unlawful, unacceptable and unconscionable. There can be no reason or rationale, no explanation or excuse, for preventing aid from reaching people in need. It is a grave violation of international law, and it must stop immediately.

The primary responsibility for this suffering lies with the party maintaining a siege. It is, however, shared by those that conduct military activities in or from populated areas, thereby using civilians as shields and placing them in harm's way. As the Secretary-General pointed out in his statement to the General Assembly yesterday, all sides, including the Syrian Government, which has the primary responsibility to protect the Syrian people, are committing atrocious acts prohibited under international humanitarian law.

Tragically, the situation in Madaya is not unique. Around 400,000 people in Syria are trapped in areas besieged by the various parties to the conflict. That includes towns and villages besieged by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Government and allied forces, and non-State armed groups and the Al-Nusra Front. More broadly, the United Nations estimates that 4.5 million people reside in areas in Syria that are hard-to-reach, subject to various forms of restrictions on the movement of people and goods that severely limit their access to services and assistance. In addition to conflict and insecurity, that includes the deliberate obstruction of, or delays in, the delivery of aid, as well as the denial or removal of certain relief items, such as medical and surgical supplies, from aid convoys.

The United Nations and its partners, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and NGOs, have worked tirelessly for over four years to bring life-saving assistance to people to need across Syria. In 2015, that included, for example, food assistance for over 6 million people on average each month, safe drinking water for over 8 million people, non-food items for over 4.8 million people, and nutrition interventions for over 1.6 million people, many of them children. This week, on 11 and 14 January, inter-agency convoys made up of 130 trucks reached the town of Madaya and the nearby Bqine, as well as Fu'ah and Kafraya, with urgent assistance for over 60,000 people, including food and nutritional support, medicines and medical equipment, and non-food items. Separately, the third part of a series of convoys brought assistance to over 37,000 people

in Al-Waer, Homs governorate. Further assistance is scheduled to reach the areas later this week. Those and other aid deliveries have saved thousands of lives, often at great cost. More than 80 humanitarian workers have been killed since the conflict began. Many others remain missing.

In some cases, simply bringing assistance to people in need is not enough. In Madaya, the siege has resulted in conditions so severe that people have lost their lives, and many others currently suffer severe acute malnutrition, which, if left untreated, may result in death. Teams on the ground are working on multiple tracks to provide urgent treatment on site, conduct screening to identify critical cases and, where required, negotiate for the timely medical evacuation of patients. At present, almost 390 patients have been screened, 9 have been evacuated together with their family members and at least 19 others are in need of urgent evacuation. The United Nations has requested approval for their immediate and unconditional transfer to a safe place for treatment and for sustained access to the area for medical and humanitarian partners.

While those developments are positive, they are but a trickle. In 2015, the United Nations was able to reach less than 3 per cent of the population of besieged areas on average, with assistance in any given sector; in 2014, the figure was less than 5 per cent. Throughout the year, 80 requests for inter-agency cross-line convoys to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, out of a total of 113, went unanswered. This week, the United Nations submitted requests for further inter-agency convoys to bring life-saving assistance to besieged and hard-to-reach communities across the country. Those requests and other outstanding requests must be approved as a matter of urgency and without further delay. Similarly, the slow and bureaucratic procedures that have been imposed on humanitarian operations in Syria must be simplified and streamlined. Food, water and medicine are not bargaining chips or favours that the parties to a conflict can grant or deny at will; they are basic necessities that lie at the very essence of survival and the right to life, which the Security Council and its members have a responsibility to protect. The Council cannot let more people die on its watch.

As highlighted by the Emergency Relief Coordinator to the Security Council last Monday, there is no alternative to a political, negotiated solution to this desperate conflict. The Council and all the relevant stakeholders, in particular those that support the warring parties, must put their differences aside and place Syria on a firm path to peace.

In the meantime, I would reiterate the Emergency Relief Coordinator's call — on behalf of the humanitarian community and all people in need — that the parties to the conflict immediately end the practice of siege and starvation and fully adhere to international humanitarian law. That will require, first, facilitating full, unhindered, unconditional and sustained access to all people in need, including in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, for all types of assistance, including medical and surgical supplies. Secondly, it will require allowing freedom of movement for civilians, of all ages, to enter and exit besieged and hard-to-reach areas in safety and dignity, and permitting the immediate medical evacuation of sick and wounded patients to a safe place for treatment. Thirdly, this will require protecting civilians from any form of violence, including targeted or indiscriminate attacks, as well as from the use of explosive weapons or landmines in populated areas, at all times.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Kang for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to convey my gratitude to Ms. Kang for her briefing. The situation that she has just described illustrates, if there were need for it, the scale of the disaster that we have been witnessing for nearly five years now in Syria. This is the greatest tragedy of the century.

France asked the Security Council for an emergency meeting today with three complementary objectives: to ensure that everyone faces up to their responsibilities in connection with the human tragedy that is unfolding before our eyes in Madaya and other besieged cities in Syria; to maximize the pressure that the Council can exert to bring about the immediate lifting of the sieges and the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance to all concerned areas; and, finally, to create the conditions necessary for the launch in a few days of the intra-Syrian dialogue, because there can be no credible political process without serious and tangible progress on the humanitarian track.

Close to 400,000 individuals are trapped in besieged cities in Syria, without any means of subsistence or any access by humanitarian workers. In addition to the cities of Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya, tens of thousands of

individuals are besieged on the outskirts of Damascus, in eastern Ghutah, in Mouadamiya, in the rural area of Damascus, near Madaya, in Darayya, in Zabadani and in other localities.

Four and a half million people are living in hard-to-reach locations: 147 such cities and villages have been identified by the United Nations, of which only 32 per cent received aid in late 2015, according to the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/962). The most vulnerable individuals, namely, women and children, are by definition the first victims. Humanitarian actors have these past few days described horrendous scenes: women and children dying of hunger in Madaya and other locations, because starvation is being used, just as it was in the Middle Ages, as a weapon of war and terror, and no one can say that they did not know.

Over and beyond the immediate lifting of all sieges, permanent, immediate and unrestricted access must be granted to humanitarian workers so as to ensure that they can assist all those in need. France wishes once again to underscore the primary responsibility borne by the regime. The most recent report of the Secretary-General states that although there were 91 requests for inter-agency convoys, only 13 were completed. Following long months of negotiations, the United Nations and its partners were able to distribute emergency assistance only twice to the people of Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya, on 11 and 15 January. This is completely insufficient.

Access of emergency assistance to the civilian population is not, as Ms. Kang stated so eloquently, a favour or a concession granted by the Syrian regime. It is an absolute obligation under the Geneva Conventions. The Council has repeatedly and in multiple resolutions asked the regime and the other parties to the conflict to put an end to their use of starvation as a weapon of war, which is clearly prohibited under international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General underscored yesterday that this constituted a war crime. The Council has also asked that attacks that directly or indiscriminately target the civilian population in Syria come to an immediate end.

In extension of France's ongoing initiatives, we renew our calls for an immediate end to attacks against the civilian population, including through the use of barrel bombs and against civilian infrastructure, especially hospitals and schools. We call upon Syria to stop bombing the civilian population and call on Russia to act responsibly in the context of its military operations in Syria and to target only Council-designated terrorist groups. Humanitarian workers also fall victim to such attacks; 81 have died in Syria since the beginning of the conflict, and 27 have either disappeared or are being detained.

Finally, at a time when intra-Syrian negotiations, which are necessary to achieve peace in Syria, are about to be launched, I wish to reiterate that there will be no credible political process without an immediate improvement in the situation on the ground for the Syrian people.

In order to be able to believe in a genuine relaunching of the political process and the implementation of a ceasefire, the Syrians must no longer be the victims of deadly, indiscriminate attacks or subjected to arbitrary detention, and they must receive the humanitarian assistance and treatment that they urgently require. France will be very careful with respect to the options proposed by the Secretary-General in his report on the implementation of confidence-building and ceasefire measures, in conformity with resolution 2254 (2015), which clearly shows that when the Council wants to present a united front, it can.

A few days before the launch of a decisive cycle of intra-Syrian discussions, the Council must shoulder its responsibilities both to put an end to the humanitarian tragedy that we see reflected in the unbearable images of the concerned locations, and thus contribute to the creation of a credible political process that could finally lead to the peace to which we all aspire.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this urgent meeting, and I thank Ms. Kang for her sobering analysis of life in besieged and hard-to-reach areas in Syria.

In recent days, the world has seen this horror for itself. Images of emaciated men and women living under siege in Madaya, of children starving to death, evokes some of the darkest moments of our history. As a visiting United Nations official said earlier this week, there are people in Madaya, but no life. What we saw should not happen in this century. In the face of such horrors, we welcome the fact that the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent have reached Madaya this week. We should all applaud their efforts to negotiate a way in. But, sadly, it is long overdue. and for some it is too late. And as we learn more about the desperate situation facing those in Madaya, it becomes

ever clearer that ad hoc deliveries will not be enough. Sustained access is now needed.

Madaya is just the tip of the iceberg. This tragic town represents just 10 per cent of the besieged areas and only 1 percent of hard-to-reach areas in Syria. Many of these other areas have not been visited by the United Nations since October. If the status quo continues, the images that we have seen from Madaya could be repeated many, many times over.

We cannot allow this to happen with the eyes of the world on us today. Let us send a clear message to the warring parties: starving civilians as a method of warfare is inhuman, unacceptable and prohibited under international humanitarian law. As the Secretary-General said in his statement yesterday, in a conflict that has already reached shocking depths of inhumanity, the suffering in Madaya is another low. We agree with him that the Council should call on all the parties, and especially the regime, which has the primary responsibility to protect Syrians, to allow unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access. And let Council members with ties to the regime use their influence, not their air force, to address this horrific situation.

We all know that the solution is a political process that ends the war, and that to achieve that we must all work together. But, as we do that, it is only right that we also draw international attention to the desperate situation in Madaya — a situation that is only worsening. It is about putting pressure on all the parties to allow access so that the United Nations can reach the over 400,000 people in need in besieged areas, and the over 4 million people in hard-to-reach areas. The sheer scale of the humanitarian crisis should serve as a reminder to us all of the urgent need to support the United Nations relief effort. That is why the United Kingdom will host the London Conference on Supporting Syria and the Region, on 4 February — alongside the United Nations, Norway, Kuwait and Germany. The participation of my Prime Minister, the Emir of Kuwait, the German Chancellor, the Norwegian Prime Minister, as well as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in London next month gives a sense of the scale of our ambition.

The London Conference is about donor pledges. But it is also about much more than that. It is the moment to address the longer-term needs of those affected by the crisis by supporting job creation, by providing education and, crucially, by putting even more pressure on the parties to protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law. At the Conference, leaders from 70 countries and from international organizations, civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector will confront and condemn violence against civilians. We will rally support to mitigate the human impact of the worse violations and abuses. We will commit essential support to deliver safer communities, safer health care and safer access to education in Syria. In doing that, we hope to drive improvements in daily life and to deliver important confidence-building measures to underpin the political process.

We should all be clear that the ultimate solution to Madaya's woes, and to those facing all Syrians, rests on a political agreement, one that brings an end to the fighting. We must continue the unity the Council showed in December and build on the agreement reached by the International Syria Support Group. We look forward to talks beginning later this month. To make a success of those talks, and for the long-term future of Syria, we also need to work now to ensure that communities are protected so that ultimately they can rebuild. To do that, we must emphasize that even wars have rules. It will be through those talks, through sustained access to besieged areas and through the London Conference that we can make this the year that suffering finally ends.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by expressing our gratitude for the briefing made today by Ms. Kang. The team coordinated by Stephen O'Brien is carrying out excellent work in Syria under very difficult circumstances. I would also like to thank France and the United Kingdom for their initiative, to which Spain subscribes.

While we thought that we had seen it all — or almost — in Syria, appalling images have now reached us through the media. Over the past month, six children under the age of 1 died in Madaya. The use of hunger as a tactic is a war crime according to the most elementary standards of international humanitarian law. Spain categorically condemns the deliberate obstruction of assistance to besieged populations in various areas in Syria. We are already too late, not only for those who have suffered from that latest episode of the war in Syria, but for the quarter of a million persons who lost their lives over the last five years. Our obligation therefore is to look ahead and to attempt to answer the following two questions: what can we do to improve the humanitarian situation and what can we do to help put an end to the conflict?

First of all, we must continue to closely follow the developments in Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya. As

co-penholder on the humanitarian situation in Syria, we have been in daily contact with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) throughout the entire assistance distribution effort, both here in New York and through the Amman regional office of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation. Our obligation — and here I am no longer referring to my country, but to the Security Council — is to ensure full compliance with resolution 2258 (2015), which we adopted unanimously on 22 December 2015. That was an initiative from Spain, Jordan and New Zealand. The first paragraph 1 of the resolution demands that all parties — I emphasize "all parties" — in particular the Syrian authorities, immediately comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. In the event that the delivery of assistance is interrupted in coming weeks, we will work with all Council members to adopt measures that will seek, first and foremost, to make that resolution more effective.

Secondly, we must address the growing number of unsuccessful requests for access in 2015. There is something amiss when OCHA can reach only 4 per cent of the population in besieged areas in Syria, as Mr. O'Brian informed us last Monday. Of the 133 requests submitted by the United Nations, almost 80 remain unanswered. We are not demanding that Syrian authorities accept just any request submitted by the United Nations. We are aware that there may be legitimate reasons to refuse a request. However, we do ask that they provide an affirmative reply in due time and form and without delay so that OCHA can react and take the measures that are appropriate in each case. Such a simple step can have a very positive impact on the ground.

Thirdly, Madaya accounts for only 10 per cent of the Syrian population under siege. To give just one example, approximately 200,000 people are still under siege by Daesh in Dayr al-Zawr. For that reason, we have asked OCHA to identify other at-risk areas and to deliver its analysis to the Security Council on 27 January. We would also suggest that the World Food Programme, together with OCHA, provide the Council with an oral briefing. Our main objective is to avoid a reoccurrence of what we have seen in Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya over the past few days.

Lastly, with regard to the political situation in Syria, we are at a critical juncture, with the prospect of a negotiation process within reach. Over the next few days there will be a series of steps that could be decisive. First of all, once again, the parties to the conflict, starting with the Syrian authorities, must fulfil their obligations in accordance with international humanitarian law. In that regard, I am referring to putting an end to the indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population, in particular the use of barrel bombs, and ensuring sustained and unconditional humanitarian access. Within the next three days, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria will present confidence-building options to the Security Council with the ultimate aim of reaching a ceasefire. Although I do not wish to prejudge the response, there are a wide array of measures, such as prisoner exchanges, that can bring some rapprochement on the ground with a view to the next round of negotiations in Geneva.

Resolution 2254 (2015) affords us a genuine opportunity to begin a new stage of dialogue between the regime and the opposition. The international community is prepared to support a political process in Syria. We trust that the parties to the conflict in Syria will not fail to take advantage of this opportunity. I conclude by once again expressing Spain's confidence in, and support to, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): I, too, thank Assistant Secretary-General Kang for her briefing.

New Zealand is pleased that, since the Council met on Monday, a second series of aid convoys were able to enter Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya yesterday and that a third series of convoys is planned in the next few days. However, as others have said, that is just scratching the surface: that gets aid through to about 62,000 people. Humanitarian workers need safe, unimpeded and sustained access to the nearly 400,000 people trapped in besieged areas throughout Syria. It has now been confirmed that many of those people are suffering through conditions as horrific as we have seen recently in Madaya and elsewhere.

The Syrian Government is responsible for besieging some areas, but others, such as various opposition groups and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), are also using siege tactics. We demand that all those using siege tactics immediately meet their international legal obligation to allow humanitarian access. Tit-for-tat granting of humanitarian access is unacceptable. Civilians should not be used as pawns, as has been happening in Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya.

Only 25 kilometres outside of Damascus, people in Madaya have been waiting since Monday to be evacuated so they can receive the medical care they urgently need. It is a complex situation and the facts are still becoming clear. What is clear enough is that the need is urgent. While we are pleased that humanitarian agencies have received approval for the entry of mobile clinics and medical teams to support treatment, we cannot understand the Syrian Government's unwillingness to grant permission for people to be evacuated. We call on the Syrian authorities to immediately grant requests for medical evacuations of the sick.

New Zealand and many others, including the Secretary-General, have emphasized numerous times that the Syrian Government must approve, without delay, requests for inter-agency convoys. As my colleague from Spain has just said, in resolution 2258 (2015), adopted only last month, the Council expressed its concern at the decline in convoy approvals by the Syrian authorities and requested that they respond expeditiously and positively to all requests for cross-line deliveries. We cannot accept that administrative delays continue to block humanitarian assistance from reaching those in need. As Ms. Kang said, the approval procedures must be simplified and carried out more quickly. Delivering aid in Syria is extremely complex and dangerous for the people delivering the aid. It would be unsafe to try to deliver aid without Government consent and risk attacks. Over 80 humanitarian workers have lost their lives since the conflict began. We do not want to see that number rise.

Intentionally starving civilians as a method of warfare has happened repeatedly during the Syrian conflict. What we are seeing today in Madaya is an alarming echo of the siege and starvation of civilians in Homs in 2014. The deliberate starving of civilians is not a natural, collateral effect of conflict. It is a conscious decision made by the besieging parties. It violates international humanitarian law. It violates Council resolutions. It may constitute a war crime.

New Zealand and Spain intend to invite the World Food Programme to brief on access to food in besieged areas at the next humanitarian consultations on Syria, on 27 January. In the meantime, New Zealand demands that the Syrian Government and other parties to the conflict immediately lift all sieges in Syria and allow the free movement of civilians and lifesaving goods. We also call on countries with influence with responsible parties to use that influence to lift the sieges. If they stand by and do nothing, they too are complicit.

The situation is so desperate that all forms of aid delivery should be considered. In that respect, we would be interested in the view of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the feasibility of delivering assistance via airdrops. Lifting the sieges and parties abiding by their obligations under international humanitarian law would help build trust and momentum ahead of the upcoming talks in Geneva. We look forward to discussing such matters in more depth with Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura on Monday. We all know that only a political solution will end the suffering of the Syrian people.

Let me conclude by commending the bravery and tireless work of the humanitarian workers working on the ground, including the United Nations, led by Humanitarian Coordinator Yacoub El Hillo, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Red Crescent.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, as it is the first time that Senegal takes the floor in a public meeting of the Security Council since we received the trust of the General Assembly and became a non-permanent member of the Council, I would like to reaffirm that the Government of Senegal is wedded to the ideals of peace, security and justice throughout the world.

It is in that spirit that my delegation would like to welcome the joint initiative taken by the United Kingdom and France to put this briefing on the agenda of the Security Council in the form of an emergency meeting given the very difficult situation experienced by millions of Syrians, especially in besieged areas. The fact that the Security Council decided to address the issue for a second time in less than a week clearly shows that the international community is greatly concerned about the indescribable suffering experienced by the Syrian people. The situation tugs at our collective conscience. We must act promptly as a result of the special responsibility borne by the Council to maintain international peace and security.

I would like to commend Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, for the clarity of her briefing. That clarity has enabled us to better understand the realities on the ground. I would

also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outstanding work carried out by all of the humanitarian personnel active in this very difficult region and working for such a noble cause, sometimes placing their very lives at risk.

While recognizing the progress that was achieved in providing humanitarian assistance to the city of Madaya, where over 40,000 individuals face the threat of starvation, as well as in Fu'ah and Kafraya, Senegal remains deeply concerned regarding the fate of 400,000 other individuals in other besieged areas and in places that are difficult to access. It is for that reason that we call for the implementation of resolution 2258 (2015), adopted on 22 December 2015, which urges all parties to immediately implement the international humanitarian law and human rights law obligations incumbent upon them, especially by taking the necessary steps to facilitate humanitarian aid access to the population, especially the many people in need of emergency assistance.

To achieve that, all players must take all the necessary measures to lift restrictions on the provision of humanitarian assistance, while remaining mindful of the fact that certain practices, such as the use of hunger as a weapon of war, can be interpreted as being war crimes and crimes against humanity. The situation is so dire that, in a joint statement on 12 January, three United Nations agencies — the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Development Programme — launched an urgent appeal to raise $8 billion over this year to assist 22.5 million people in Syria and the wider region. The World Health Organization is concerned that there is a serious health risk in Syria, where 57 per cent of health facilities and 51 per cent of medical centres have been partially or completely destroyed. In that regard, the appeal launched by the agency, which already faces a very serious shortage of funding, for the mobilization of $45 million to provide assistance to 11 million Syrians in the country in 2016 is worthy of our full attention.

Finally, our common challenge is to ensure that tackling the humanitarian situation of refugees and displaced Syrians takes place in complement to the political process — perhaps even before it. Substantial progress was achieved in 2015, including the unanimous adoption by the Security Council, on 18 December 2015, of resolution 2254 (2015), within the context of the ministerial session, with a crucial agreement on the terms of the negotiations of the political process of a future ceasefire and the fight against terrorism.

It would be remiss of me to conclude without paying tribute to the initiative of the United Kingdom to convene, in London on 4 February, a donor conference on the provision of assistance to the civilian population of Syria, a population affected by a war in its sixth year. The results are ghastly: 250,000 dead, 4.5 million refugees and 13 million displaced persons.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China pays tribute to you, Mr. President, for holding today's public meeting, and thanks the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Coordinator, Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, for her briefing.

The Syrian conflict, which has gone on for five years, has caused a huge number of civilian casualties and triggered a serious humanitarian crisis and refugee crisis. In particular, the population in some besieged faces a severe shortage of food and medicine, and their living conditions are truly appalling. China is deeply saddened by the humanitarian situation in Syria and sympathizes with the Syrian people in their suffering. We urge all the parties in Syria to effectively implement the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and to go all out to work with the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies to carry out full-fledged relief activities in all besieged areas and alleviate the burning needs of the population. China hopes that the international humanitarian pledging conference on Syria, to be held early next month, will achieve positive results. We call on international donors to show generosity so as to ease the suffering of the Syrian people.

China has been actively supporting efforts to ease the humanitarian situation in Syria. So far, through various channels, China has provided, on nine different occasions, humanitarian assistance to Syria totalling RMB/ ¥ 685 million. At the Group of 20 Summit held last year, President Xi Jinping announced an additional $100 million of humanitarian assistance to the relevant countries and international organizations. We are ready, together with the international community, to play our part in easing the humanitarian crisis in Syria and improving the livelihoods of the Syrian people.

Achieving a political solution to the question of Syria is the best way to resolve the relevant questions on Syria, including on its humanitarian dimension. The

international community should remain steadfast in its search for a political solution. As the humanitarian situation worsens, there is a greater need to push for a political solution. The International Syria Support Group has held three ministerial-level meetings so far. Last month, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2254 (2015). That was the first resolution ever adopted by the Council on the political process in Syria. It consolidated the common understanding of the international community for a political solution. It has injected vitality into the search for a political solution. It is truly a hard-won result.

The priority facing the international community is to keep alive the current positive momentum for a political solution and to make sure that the relevant process will stay the course and produce results. At the same time, it is necessary to make sure that the United Nations continues to be the main channel for mediation. China calls upon the parties in Syria to seize this historic opportunity, swiftly restart negotiations and approach the political process in Syria in such a way that real results can be achieved soon. China is ready, together with the parties concerned, to continue to play a positive and constructive role in finding a political solution to the Syrian question.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express our deep regret at the deteriorating humanitarian situation being borne by the Syrian people, inside and outside the country. I also express our thanks and gratitude to all United Nations humanitarian workers and those of other organizations for the assistance provided to the Syrian people.

The continuation of the Syrian crisis over the past few years and the escalation of its militarization have led to acute deterioration in many areas. I express our condemnation of all targeting of civilians in conflict areas and all explotiation of civilians as a war tactic by means of starvation, laying siege or using civilians as humanitarian shields. Since the outbreak of this humanitarian crisis, particularly in Madaya, Kafraya, Fu'ah and Muadamiyet al-Sham, Egypt has established close contacts with many United Nations officials, Syrian businessmen, members of the opposition and members of the Syrian Government, with a view to finding speedy solutions that meet the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people, particuarly in besieged areas, regardless of their affiliations. We remain confident that humanitarian work should rise above political differences. In that regard, Egypt welcomes the arrival of some assistance to those areas and encourages all parties to continue their cooperation with the United Nations and other emergency relief organizations in order to avoid the recurrence of such tragedies.

The Security Council is tackling the many different aspects of the crisis in Syria, in spite of the differences of opinion over certain issues. Egypt believes that, when it comes to humanitarian issues, the international community and the members of the Security Council should remain united, particularly since we see that certain countries attempt at times to take advantage of political situations. We appeal to all parties to refrain from politicizing the crisis of the Syrian people or using it as a means of bringing pressure to bear, since that would lead only to further suffering for the civilians in this conflict and would increase division among the different parties.

We reiterate that putting an end to the suffering of the Syrian people requires a political solution that puts an end to armed conflict and lays the basis for a democratic State. We appeal to all members of the Security Council and to the International Syria Support Group to do their utmost to preserve the political path and the plan of action agreed within the Vienna process, endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2254 (2015). We also appeal to all parties to work towards that purpose, after so many years of stalemate. We warn that any attempts to derail the current political efforts would lead only to further escalation of the armed conflict and to a vicious circle that would perpetuate the crisis.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the briefing on the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and for the work carried out by Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, together with Mr. Stephen O'Brien, in leading that office.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela rejects the siege tactics carried out by any of the parties to the conflict against civilians, which violate international law and international human rights law and constitute a war crime. In Syria, there is a complex war with a high level of violence and a diversity of actors in the armed conflict. In addressing such a sensitive issue, therefore, we must do so in a balanced way and refrain from politicizing human rights and ensure that such siege practices are put to an end.

The Syrian Government is responsible for protecting its citizens, and it has done so in areas that are under its control and even areas beyond its control. That is a fact that has been reflected in United Nations reports. It is our hope that cooperation between OCHA and the Syrian authorities will continue and be strengthened beyond what we are now seeing. However, we are concerned by the fact that whatever is done in this tragic situation is never enough and that there are hundreds of thousands of Syrians under siege by various non-State armed groups and terrorist groups, with whom one cannot even negotiate to make them respect international law and international humanitarian law.

We therefore regret that the Syrian humanitarian issue has been politicized since the conflict began. We believe that humanitarian assistance must be focused on meeting all the needs of those on the ground and those who have crossed the border to other countries in search of security. It is therefore vital to have the support and consent of the Government of Syria, as established in United Nations resolutions.

The main enemy of Syria and the region is the self-proclaimed Islamic State and the other terrorist organizations operating in that brotherly country. The world witnessed the atrocities perpetrated by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) when Palmyra fell and ISIS went in and destroyed the heritage of humankind, slaughtering people in its path, including the world-renowned archaeologist Khaled Mohamad al-Asaad, while the world watched in astonishment and the Security Council stood by in silence.

On many occasions our country has expressed its dismay about the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. When the Council met to renew the mandate of resolution 2191 (2014) last December (see S/PV.7595), we expressed our interest in seeing the humanitarian assistance mechanism reach the ares most in need. Based on the most recent report of the Secretary-General, dated 11 December 2015 (S/2015/962), more than 212,000 people remain under siege by ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front and associated groups. We await a strategy by OCHA for tackling that problem. In that context, we are concerned by the statement by Mr. Yacoub El Hillo, OCHA Resident Coordinator, on the delicate situation of more than 42,000 people in the vicinity of Madaya, who are at risk of starvation, as well as the more than 20,000 people in Kafraya and Fu'ah, who unfortunately do not seem to have aroused the same interest. We welcome the positive response of the Syrian Government, as indicated in the joint statement, to facilitating access to humanitarian convoys. In that regard, we have heard reports of a second delivery of assistance to Madaya, Kafraya and Fu'ah in the last few hours. We hope that this coordination and cooperation will be extended to the entire Syrian territory.

We would like to express our appreciation for the work carried out by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and OCHA, which, in coordination with the Government, has enabled humanitarian assistance to reach the populations of Madaya, Kafraya and Fu'ah. In less than two days, 200 volunteers and aid workers dispatched 45 convoys to Madaya to reach 40,000 people, and another 18 convoys to Kafraya and Fu'ah intended for approximately 20,000 people. In that context, it is important to draw attention to the safety guarantees that must be upheld by non-State actors to ensure that the assistance reaches the civilians in need, and not the fighters. Similarly, the parties must guarantee the safety and security of humanitarian workers in such difficult conditions.

We recognize the noble efforts of the humanitarian agencies in Syria, whose work takes place under difficult conditions owing to the same conflict in which the country and its people have been plunged in extremely poor conditions. For that reason, we condemn the attacks against personnel and the facilities in which they carry out their noble work. It is unacceptable that humanitarian personnel be military targets by any of the parties.

Over the past five years, we have seen how the country and its population have suffered the ravages of terrorist groups, making Syria a place where they try out and promote their savagery in order to impose their totalitarian vision. Unfortunately, it seems that the international community has not yet acknowledged the danger that the extremist ideas represent for the future of humankind, given the way some media have portrayed certain leaders of some of those groups as moderates, concealing their long record of intolerance and hatred, in order to advance the particular political agendas of a few stakeholders. We stress that the areas controlled by ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front and their allies are a genuine challenge for humanitarian organizations and for the international community. All efforts made to reduce the operational capacity of those groups will benefit the civilian population and help bring about a negotiated political solution to the conflict.

In December 2015, we held a ministerial meeting with the aim of promoting the paths towards peace and political dialogue. We must seize the opportunity that has arisen and decisively strengthen the peace process. The resolution of the humanitarian crisis in Syria is tied to the ceasefire set forth in resolution 2254 (2015) and the initiation of peace talks among the warring parties and among Syrians themselves. Furthermore, the Council must fulfil its role of overcoming the obstacles to restoring the peace that was snatched from the people of Syria. We call on all parties negotiating in Geneva to reach a political solution to this terrible armed conflict to act in good faith and without preconditions. We must coordinate our efforts and move together in the same direction. It is important that we maintain the momentum that was reached last December and that nothing stands in our way from continuing on the road towards peace.

Finally, we reiterate our support for the efforts of the Special Envoy for the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to bring about a peaceful political solution to this conflict and we await his report due next Monday. We must remain united in the Security Council in support of a political solution to the conflict as the only effective way to resolve the terrible humanitarian tragedy being experienced by the people of Syria.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is my first opportunity to address the Security Council in an open meeting, I would like to underscore that Japan is prepared to work with you, Mr. President, and all the members of the Council to achieve international peace and security. I would also like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the important office of President of the Security Council in the first month of its work this year. We thank you for convening today's emergency meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

My sincere gratitude goes to Ms. Kyung-wha Kang for shedding light on the grave situation in Syria.

The Syrian crisis, now entering its sixth year, represents one of the worst humanitarian crises of our generation. The numbers speak for themselves. Out of a population of approximately 17 million, 12 million Syrians — half of them children — require assistance. However, for the 4.5 million who live in so-called "hard-to-reach areas, assistance reaches them only sporadically. Indeed, 400,000 individuals live under siege and lack access to humanitarian aid. That is more than 10 per cent of the population of your country, Mr. President.

The town of Madaya is but one example of the plight faced by countless Syrians on a daily basis. Recent images of United Nations convoys entering the town provided momentary relief. I would like to reiterate our utmost appreciation to the humanitarian aid staff, whose courageous and invaluable efforts continue to save lives. But how much longer must Syrians live at the peril of aid-delivery approvals? The case of Madaya and today's briefing by the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs remind us that the situation is far from resolved.

In resolution 2254 (2015), adopted in December, the Council expressed its strong support for a political solution to the crisis. We look forward to the convening of the first intra-Syrian dialogue on 25 January. Japan will continue to support the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and the United Nations-facilitated political process towards a political transition based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) in its entirety.

The dire humanitarian situation must be addressed regardless of the political process. Why must Syrians endure the same suffering only weeks after the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), which demanded that all parties immediately comply with their obligations under international law? Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made it very clear yesterday at the General Assembly that the use of food as a weapon of war is a war crime and that all sides are committing atrocious acts prohibited under international humanitarian law.

Let us not forget that the success of the political process is contingent on the support of the Syrian people. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the goal of the political process and efforts undertaken in the Council are to end the suffering of the Syrian people on the ground.

The indiscriminate attacks against civilians and the impediments against humanitarian access undermine the mutual confidence necessary for a political solution. While all actors are accountable for the protection of civilians, the Government of Syria has the primary responsibility of protecting its own citizens. The protection of civilians is an obligation under international humanitarian law. We call on all parties to provide rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian

access, as called for in Council resolutions. In that regard, we particularly call on States that constitute the International Syria Support Group to use their influence to that end.

The humanitarian situation in Syria also requires the solidarity of the international community by way of increased assistance. Since 2011, Japan has disbursed more than $1.1 billion in humanitarian aid, including food, sanitation and other assistance to Syrians and neighbouring host countries. We are nonetheless concerned that only 43 per cent of funding needs were met in 2015. With our eyes set on the eventual resolution of the crisis and the return of Syrians to their homes, our assistance should not be limited to immediate life-saving assistance, such as food and medical supplies, but should also cover assistance such as vocational training and educational aid to assist Syrians on their paths towards self-reliance.

The coming London conference in February will be a critical opportunity to demonstrate the resolve and solidarity of the international community with those suffering on the ground. We look forward to participating at the conference, where Japan will announce, pending approval of our Diet, a substantial new assistance package. The package will include immediate relief such as food and assistance in the form of vocational training for Syrians. Our assistance will also go to surrounding countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

When United Nations convoys entered the besieged town of Madaya this week, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affaris reported having witnessed people who seemed to have lost hope that the world cared about them. Madaya is a wake-up call about the continued suffering of millions of people in Syria. I would like to thank France and the United Kingdom for requesting today's emergency meeting, as well as Spain and New Zealand for having been instrumental in promoting critical Security Council resolutions on this issue. We, the Council, must remain vigilant and not condone the humanitarian violations forced upon millions of Syrians.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank the Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, who provided us with a clear picture of the latest developments in the situation in the besieged areas in Syria.

It has been roughly a week since the world has come to know the horrifying truth surrounding the siege of Madaya, located just 25 kilometres from the capital city of Damascus. Everybody was shocked by the graphic images of death and starvation coming out of the town, something that is virtually impossible to imagine nowadays. The level of savagery that the people of Madaya have been subjected to can only be compared to the Nazi atrocities during the Second World War. We extend our deepest sympathies to the innocent Syrian people who are suffering indiscriminately as a result of the terrible ongoing conflict in their country.

We welcome the delivery of the second batch of humanitarian aid to Madaya and call on all sides of the Syrian conflict, including the Syrian Government, to show consistency in providing the United Nations with unhindered access to the town and other besieged areas, as required under international law and pursuant to resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). We support the statement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who said yesterday that those responsible for this atrocity must be prosecuted. We want to remind everyone in Syria that anyone deliberately using starvation as a weapon is committing a war crime and will be held accountable sooner or later.

I would like to ask a specific question. At a meeting a few days ago, we were informed that nearly 400 residents of the town required immediate medical care and evacuation. What happened to them? If they were not evacuated, we would like to know precisely who prevented the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs from taking care of them. We believe that it is an obligation of the Security Council, without delay, to come up with a document establishing stronger responsibility and accountability for those who target civilians in Syria. As a country that experienced an artificial famine in the early 1930s, Ukraine calls on the Council to make its voice heard when it says that using starvation as a method of warfare by either side cannot and will not be tolerated.

Finally, some of us in the Security Council may have different opinions on the political situation in Syria, but we should stand united when it comes to addressing the humanitarian crisis in the country, which has already suffered so much in the course of the past five years.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are concerned by the very complex

humanitarian situation in Syria, which has arisen as a result of the continuing internal armed conflict. We note the efforts that have been undertaken by the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations and by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. It is of critical importance that all sides to the conflict — as well as the States enjoying influence over them — make every possible effort to provide all the basic necessities to the inhabitants of the besieged cities. We are undertaking the relevant contacts with the relevant Syrian authorities, prompting them towards constructive cooperation with the humanitarian structures of the United Nations.

Of particular concern, however, is the situation of the inhabitants of the cities besieged by fighters of the terrorist groups Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Islamic State, Ahrar Al-Sham and Jaysh Al-Islam, which hide behind civilians and use them as human shields, kidnap them for ransom and loot humanitarian assistance convoys. Even groups acting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army are guilty of these violations.

The kinds of issues that we are discussing today require an objective, comprehensive and professional approach that takes account of the realities of the region. Reference has been made to Madaya, but not a word has been said about other areas such as Nubul and Al-Zahraa, in the province of Aleppo, and here we are speaking of the fates of tens of thousands of individuals.

United Nations humanitarian agencies are fully aware of the efforts that were undertaken to lift the sieges on the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp and in the area of Al-Waer, where there has been very strong compliance with the agreements reached by all the sides. If we look at the situation practically, however, humanitarian shipments to the problem areas that were referred to today, including Madaya, take place with the active assistance of the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic. This has been confirmed by the staff of United Nations humanitarian agencies, who are monitoring the delivery of aid to the city. A second convoy is heading for Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya, and a third is being prepared for 17 January.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator, Yacoub El Hilio, has taken note of the satisfactory situation concerning the continuing direct contacts between the World Health Organization and the Government of Syria regarding the issue of organizing an emergency medical evacuation of civilians in need thereof.

Humanitarian operations have also been launched by the Russian armed forces active in Syria, upon the request of that Government. Assistance has been sent to the city of Dayr al-Zawr, which is currently under siege by terrorists. We have not heard a word about this in our meeting today. Russian parachute pallets have made it possible to deliver 22 tons of cargo. Work on this track will, of course, continue.

The Security Council is paying close attention to the humanitarian situation in Syria. This is already the second meeting this week on this issue. Today we are meeting in an open format, and we would note that even from the perspective of the Council's standing practice, this is somewhat unusual. Very soon, on 27 January, we will be discussing the humanitarian aspects of the Syrian crisis, following the issuance of the monthly report of the Secretary-General.

It is almost as if, under the pretext of the deteriorating situation in besieged cities and regions, attempts were being made to derail the launch of the intra-Syrian talks planned for 25 January. All of this runs counter to resolution 2254 (2015), pursuant to which there must be no preconditions to the launch of the talks. Humanitarian issues must form an integral component of the intra-Syrian negotiations, and yet experience has shown that when no one interferes with the sides, they can quickly reach a lasting agreement.

As the launch of the inter-Syrian talks grows closer, there is a great deal of unnecessary noise and an increased use of the dishonest tactic, previously used on many occasions, of politicizing humanitarian issues, and the issue is being raised in international forums with, unfortunately, double standards prevailing once again. It is clear that those behind this do not like the Vienna agreement and will not abandon their doomed plan for a forceful solution in Syria. We have not forgotten the level of opposition we had to overcome to ensure that resolution 2254 (2015) included mention of the Vienna Statements. Even those States that played a positive role in elaborating the Vienna decisions and Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) could be more consistent and focused when it comes to its implementation.

However, one cannot avoid resolving the fundamental issues, namely, those of promoting dialogue on resolving the Syrian issue. This most important thing now is to compile a representative list

of Syrian opposition delegations and to consolidate the list of terrorist organizations active in Syria.

But there is one other, no less important issue: the fact that there is no alternative to forging a broad, intergovernmental form of cooperation among States, including on the military presence in Syria, so as to enhance the effectiveness of the fight against terrorist organizations. The proposals made by the Russian Federation in this respect remain on the table.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): Let me start by thanking you, Mr. President, for having organized this afternoon's meeting. Let me also thank Assistant Secretary-General Kyung-wha Kang for her briefing.

It is absolutely unacceptable by any standards to allow as many as 400,000 people or more to continue living and dying in besieged areas in Syria. For this reason, we support all initiatives aimed at denouncing such situations in the strongest possible terms and applying the necessary political pressure to decisively end this tragic situation and state of affairs.

We warmly welcome the access of humanitarian convoys to the town of Madaya and to other places under siege by rebels in the north-west part of Syria. We commend the outstanding efforts by the humanitarian community, which, against all odds, keeps on working to save lives and provide the minimum necessary comfort to the Syrian people, who are in absolute distress.

Our praise goes also to the Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Mr. Yacoub El Hillo, and to the personnel of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, who in the past few days were able to deliver much-needed provisions and medical supplies, including blankets and clothing. We sincerely hope that increased pressure will force the Government and the opposition forces to continue allowing regular and unimpeded access of humanitarian aid to all besieged areas in Syria.

The eloquent statement made by the Secretary-General yesterday described the situation in Madaya as having reached a shocking depth of inhumanity owing to the suffering to which women and men, including children and the elderly, are subjected. Reports of people dying from starvation or being killed by snipers or landmines while trying to flee amount to war crimes, as the Secretary-General has pointed out. Those responsible for such despicable actions must be held accountable.

In the political process, in particular if that process is to succeed, the warring parties must show a genuine commitment to respecting the basic tenets of international humanitarian law and human rights law. They must put an end to the suffering of the civilian population, in particular those trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. We hope that the preparations of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Steffan de Mistura, for the political talks between the Syrian Government and the Syrian opposition in Geneva, due to start on 25 January, will continue unhindered, and that a political solution to this humanitarian catastrophe can be achieved as soon as possible.

With the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), a commitment was made to accelerate efforts to achieve a ceasefire that would run in parallel to the political process, pursuant to the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), and move the political process ahead expeditiously. As such, the modalities and requirements for a ceasefire must be determined, and the necessary pressure applied on all the parties, in order to enable the lifting of all sieges on civilian-populated areas, thereby facilitating the political settlement to the Syrian conflict. That remains the only way to stop the tragedy now afflicting the people of Syria. In that connection, we look forward to hearing the briefing that will be delivered to the Council next Monday by Mr. De Mistura.

The people of Syria need adequate responses from the Security Council. It is our duty to respond in order to give peace a chance.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I join earlier speakers in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Kang for her briefing, which provided a vital update on ongoing efforts to respond to the critical health needs of civilians in the hard-to-reach and besieged areas in Syria.

We deplore the unacceptable human cost of the ongoing conflict. It is simply staggering that more than 400,000 Syrians live under siege conditions, a tool of warfare that hearkens back to the Middle Ages and which civilized nations and people have since rejected. It is unimaginable that, in the twenty-first century, parties to the Syrian conflict would resort to the deplorable tactic of besieging cities and starving whole populations, including women and children, as a strategy of war. The employment of that strategy adds another inhumane and horrifying dimension to the Syrian conflict.

Earlier this week, we were heartened by the breakthrough made by the United Nations and its partners in securing safe passage for and conducting humanitarian relief missions in the besieged towns of Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya. We call on all parties to ensure that such access continues to be provided to those towns. We expect that access for humanitarian relief and supplies will be granted to other hard-to-reach areas, including those under siege by various parties to the conflict.

Malaysia shares the concerns about the plight of the 400 people in immediate need of medical evacuation from Madaya, as highlighted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We urge the relevant authorities to expedite their immediate evacuation. For those whose condition makes evacuation impossible, we would demand that the necessary providers of medical assistance be given unimpeded and expedited access to Madaya. While my delegation welcomes the lifting of the blockade against Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya, we stress that all parties to the conflict have an unequivocal responsibility to protect civilians at all times. The besiege-and-starve strategy, which callously devalues human life and violates international law, should cease.

In addition to the daily struggle to survive the hail of bullets and bombs, the situation of ordinary Syrians, including those under siege, is increasingly precarious, in particular with the onset of winter. We wish to underscore that a political solution to the conflict requires no further amplification. For that, the enablers must be put in place. Malaysia affirms its support for the initiative led by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for a political resolution to the Syrian conflict as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). In that connection, we call on all the relevant parties to participate in the talks facilitated by the United Nations, which are scheduled to take place 25 January, without preconditions. Syria and ordinary Syrians have bled long enough.

In conclusion, while we are hopeful that the upcoming talks can pave the way for a sustained truce or a cessation of hostilities among the various parties, particularly between the Government and the opposition forces, the dire humanitarian crisis faced by ordinary Syrians necessitates urgent action by the international community to ensure the safe passage and conduct of humanitarian assistance, aid and relief to those most in need, especially those in hard-to-reach and besieged areas. We call on States with influence on the parties to the conflict to do their utmost to ensure that the sieges end and that humanitarian aid be made accessible to all.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Kang for the very sobering briefing. I would also like to thank my fellow Security Council members for organizing the meeting on short notice.

At the outset, I want to commend the brave United Nations and humanitarian workers who are carrying out lifesaving work in Syria under the deeply challenging circumstances of a conflict zone. Their work is courageous and deeply valued. Millions depend on them.

We have come to the Chamber today because the world has been profoundly shaken by the display of the sheer brutality of the Al-Assad regime in Syria. The reports of starvation coming out of Madaya have truly shocked our conscience and our sense of humanity. Most disturbing is the fact that this is not just a single instance of horror and cruelty. Rather, this is part of a deliberate and systematic siege-and-starve tactic employed by the regime against civilians across Syria — another barbaric act in a conflict full of such acts. The Council has adopted one resolution after another on humanitarian access. And yet, over the past year, we have only seen the suffering of Syrians deepen to outrageous levels. This cannot go on.

We welcome the two United Nations shipments made to Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya this week. It is lifesaving assistance, but it is not nearly enough and it is coming far too late. Before Monday, the 40,000 people in Madaya trapped by the Syrian regime and its allies, including Hizbollah, had received almost no humanitarian aid since October. Therefore, although the shipments made this week are necessary, the need is much greater. At least 32 people, including infants, have died from starvation in the past 30 days, according to the latest updates from humanitarian workers. The United Nations has reported that more than 400 people are near death due to starvation — those are just the cases that we know about, there could well be more. The only two doctors in the town — two doctors for all 40,000 people — have very limited ability to treat this sick and weakened community. Madaya's hospital has been destroyed, and the one remaining medical facility faces severe shortages of medicines, supplies and health personnel. The facility consists of one large room where, earlier this week, humanitarian

workers saw 20 weakened people suffering from severe malnutrition, sleeping on the cold, hard floor without mattresses.

When United Nations and International Committee of the Red Cross workers arrived in Madaya on Monday, the grateful local distribution committee insisted on providing a meal, trying their best to offer hospitality, truly generous of spirit, yet all they had to offer was hot salted water with very few grains of floating rice. Madaya has had no bread for nearly five months, and what food is available is sold at exorbitant prices: 1 kilogram of sugar costs $150 and 1 kilogram of rice costs $200. Madaya has simply been cut off from the world. Civilians who have tried to escape or to find food have been killed or injured by anti-personnel mines and sniper fire by pro-regime forces. Since the Syrian regime has cut off power and fuel for generators, the residents of this mountain town — where temperatures are now dropping often below freezing — must simply risk their lives to collect firewood to keep their children warm at night. That must change.

We reiterate calls on the Syrian regime to allow immediate, regular, unconditional and unimpeded access. The United Nations formally made a request to the Syrian regime three days ago to bring in mobile medical units and medical teams to Madaya to conduct nutrition assessments and to treat the most critical cases. That request was just approved today, but the units and teams must arrive immediately, with no further delays.

The exhausted medical personnel in Madaya urgently need this support to stabilize and treat those who are severely malnourished. The most dire cases — the 400 people the United Nations identified as near death due to starvation — must be treated or evacuated to a safe location immediately. The stories of horror coming out of Syria have become so chillingly commonplace. but they simply cannot make us numb: families trying to survive on what cannot even be called soup, just hot water and boiled spices, young babies unable to feed because their mothers suffer from such serious malnutrition and frail elders wasting away to nothingness. We cannot just become immune to the stories of their plight.

We, as a Council, must demand rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to the residents of Madaya and all civilians in Syria, not merely as a matter of implementing Security Council resolutions, but as a moral imperative. As we all know, the hunger, suffering, and obstruction of humanitarian access should never have happened in the first place and it is by no means limited to Madaya.

The Damascus suburbs towns of Mouadamiya and Daraya are also worth highlighting. since they also continue to be strangled by the Syrian regime. Madaya is just one of 12 areas in Syria besieged by the regime, while armed opposition groups have surrounded civilians in Fu'ah and Kafraya and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has surrounded Dayr al-Zawr. In addition to the 400,000 in those besieged areas, 4 million more Syrians are in hard-to-reach areas where it is increasingly difficult for the United Nations to send assistance.

Denying humanitarian access to anyone, anywhere, must stop. While we welcome the United Nations progress towards meeting the needs of those in Madaya, Fu'ah, and Kafraya, one-off deliveries are not a solution to the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the besiegement of communities. All communities should be guaranteed access to food, medicine and basic goods. That has to be our goal. And since we only saw access deteriorate and malnutrition and starvation increase in 2015, we all have to re-examine the strategies to do better.

In the past year, we saw the number of Syrians who need humanitarian relief increase to 13.5 million, which is another 1.3 million in need. The number of Syrians receiving aid in hard-to-reach areas continues to dramatically decline, from 1.1 million in 2014 to 625,000 in 2015. In besieged areas, on average only 3 per cent received humanitarian assistance, as Assistant Secretary-General Kang just noted. We must stop acting as though such suffering is simply inevitable. In the past year, the Syrian regime did not even respond to more than half of requests from the United Nations to deliver assistance across conflict lines. According to the United Nations, if the regime approved such outstanding requests, 1.4 million people would receive assistance. As a United Nations partner, the United States intends to help in developing strategies to reverse the trends of the past year.

The Syrian regime must minimize administrative procedures. We, as a Council, must effectively press the parties to implement the resolutions we have adopted. In that regard, we request that the United Nations immediately bring to the attention of the Council any obstacles to humanitarian access so that we may take action.

The International Syria Support Group (ISSG) discussed the need to take steps to ensure expeditious humanitarian access throughout Syria, according to resolution 2165 (2014). And the ISSG called for United Nations pending requests for humanitarian deliveries to be granted. In resolution 2254 (2015), the Council called on ISSG States to use their influence immediately to those ends.

As we have said before, the only way to stop the violence and end Syria's conflict is through advancing a negotiated political transition as outlined in resolution 2254 (2015). But while we work toward that goal, Syrians literally cannot wait — whether for food, medicine or clean water. It is critical that the Syrian regime and all parties allow immediate, unconditional and unfettered humanitarian assistance to reach all of those in need. All States Members of the United Nations must unite in pressuring the Syrian Government, or any actor over which it has leverage, to grant access to Madaya and to all communities across Syria.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Uruguay.

First, I thank Assistant Secretary-General Kang for her briefing. The content of her statement was profoundly moving.

The Government of Uruguay is deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Syria. Above and beyond the many efforts being made to find a solution to this protracted conflict, the humanitarian situation for the Syrian people continues to be a devastating one and has been exacerbated by the practices of their own Government, rebel armed groups and terrorist organizations. Uruguay demands that all parties to the conflict allow humanitarian aid convoys to have access to the entire country, without delay — and particularly those areas that are under siege by any one of those parties.

Widespread hunger and malnutrition in areas such as Madaya, Fu'ah, Kafraya, Dayr al-Zawr, Daraya, areas in eastern Ghouta and the environs of the capital of Damascus is utterly unacceptable. The arrival, yesterday and Monday, of humanitarian aid convoys in Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya is a positive sign, but it must be followed by immediate and unconditional access of humanitarian aid convoys in response to requests by United Nations agencies and its partners on the ground in Syria. We demand that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, a State Member of the United Nations, comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law and cease to impede aid that would ease the tremendous suffering of its people. That same obligation is also incumbent upon other non-State actors in the conflict, who are also responsible for such an affront to the most basic norms of civilization. Keeping the people of those areas close to starvation as a weapon is a war crime, which is exacerbated by the fact that they are unable to escape or flee for their lives. This is a clear breach of international humanitarian law.

Sooner or later, all those responsible for these atrocities must account for their actions. The Government of Uruguay hopes that resolution 2258 (2015), adopted in December, and the intensive efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura, will enable humanitarian access without obstacles or delays. Uruguay is confident that, in the next few days, the bases set out by resolution 2254 (2015) for the start of the transition and the ceasefire in Syria will be established. That is a sine qua none for preventing the ongoing deterioration of the living conditions of the population. They must recover, as soon as possible, their right to live in peace and enjoy the most basic human rights, which have been continously violated by all the warring parties since the beginning of the conflict.

In the midst of all this, we pay tribute to all persons on the ground who are risking their own lives to provide humanitarian assistance to the innocent victims of these atrocities.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to start by congratulating your country, Sir, on its election as non-permament member of the Security Council and on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of January.

This morning we addressed two identical letters to the Secretary-General and to the President of the General Assembly concerning the emergency humanitarian work undertaken by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

It is well known that one of the essential principles of humanitarian assistance is the avoidance of all

politicization and double standards. This has been clearly established in the United Nations guidelines on the provision of humanitarian emergency assistance, as provided in General Assembly resolution 46/182. Unfortunately, some use humanitarian issues to further their political agendas. The problem is that this runs counter to the guiding principles of United Nations humanitarian action, and does not serve humanitarian action as a whole. Therefore, such action is immoral, and the objective is not to assist those in need, but rather to exploit their suffering to achieve specific political goals. Those who wish to help the people in Syria must first tackle the deeply rooted causes of the problem — for example, terrorism fuelled from abroad. The humanitarian disaster emerged in several parts of Syria only after terrorist groups entered the country. Before that, individuals enjoyed a safe, secure and dignified life.

Humanitarian assistance requires full transparency, coordination and cooperation with the Syrian Government, rather than unnecessary criticism. I wish to remind members that the Syrian Government has deployed all its efforts and resources to provide assistance to all those suffering, without discrminiation. The Syrian Government has cooperated with the United Nations, and we have done so in fact, not just words. We need help in bearing this burden. The Syrian Government and the United Nations thus far have implemented six humanitarian assistance plans, by which assistance has been provided to millions of Syrians. It must be recalled that the Syrian Government continues to bear the major burden of this emergency assistance because of the insufficient financing for the humanitarian assistance plans.

Some attempt to say that access of humanitarian assistance to troubled areas can be achieved by accepting all demands of the United Nations and that aid would then be delivered, and that the Syrian Government should simply agree as if were nothing more than an administrative procedure. This is a simplistic way of seeing things and is not in keeping with the facts on the ground. There are a number of considerations that cannot be ignored. We are referring to providing assistance to dangerous areas, where armed terrorist organizations are active, including terrorist organizations that have been listed by the Security Council, and in areas neighbouring those areas. These terrorist groups carry out terrorist acts, and military actions are being undertaken to combat them. All precautions need to be taken to ensure the safety and the security of those active in the humanitarian field and that the routes they use are safe.

Furthermore, humanitarian assistance must be delivered to individuals, and should not fall into the hands of terrorists, as has happened in the past. For example, terrorists seized humanitarian assistance sent to the inhabitants of Madaya; they looted their houses, seized the aid and then exploited the inhabitants by selling the food they had looted at exhorbitant prices, creating a source of financing of terrorism. That was what the whole world heard yesterday from the inhabitants of Madaya in their testimony given to representatives of international organizations.

The Syrian Government is the Government that is most mindful of its people. No one can claim to care more about our people than we do, no other country, particularly when it comes to providing assistance to dangerous areas under the control of armed terrorist groups. The Syrian Government is making real, concrete efforts in this context. These are not just empty words. I recall by way of example, and the list is not exhaustive, a single case regarding the city of Madaya, this city that some have used to try to manipulate international public opinion. The reality is that a great many people are not aware that the Government of Syria, in cooperation with the United Nations and international organizations, enabled the provision of three shipments of humanitarian aid to Madaya, starting on 18 October 2015. The last shipment arrived yesterday, 14 January 2016.

The Syrian Government addressed a note to the Resident Coordinator dated 27 December 2015 to ensure that humanitarian aid would be delivered to Madaya, to which we have not had a reponse. I quote here the note of the Minister for Foreign Affairs for Syrians Abroad:

> "It is our honour to request your august office to do everything possible as rapidly as possible to ensure, in parallel with the evacuation of those injured in these areas, that medical, food and fuel supplies are deliverd on 29 December 2015 as a priority, and that food assistance be delivered three days later in cities such as Madaya, Kafraya and Fu'ah, where living conditions are very difficult".

The Syrian Government still has not received a response to its request. The assistance provided during the last shipment consisted of 89 truckloads.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic would like once again to reiterate its commitment to cooperate with the Organization and the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide humanitarian assistance to affected civilians in all parts of Syria, without discrimination, including areas identified by the United Nations as hard-to-reach or under siege.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.